

HITCHENS ON ISRAEL - TAKI ON THE SAUDI ROYALS

OCTOBER 6, 2003

The American Conservative

YOUR BILL, SIR



**Americans Learn the
Cost of Empire**

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CHRIS HIER'S

[COVER]

The Cost of Empire

BY CHRISTOPHER LAYNE President Bush's war policy marks the beginning of the end of America's era of global dominance. **Page 7**

[POSTWAR]

I Was Wrong

BY JACK STROCCHI A repentant hawk trades his arrows for an olive branch. **Page 11**

[WORLD]

An Empire—If You Can Keep It

BY DOMINIC LIEVEN A British academic argues that Americans should heed history's lessons on imperial management. **Page 13**

[MIDEAST]

Zionism: A Defense

BY PETER HITCHENS A prominent conservative contends that cultural and political kinship make Israel the West's natural ally. **Page 17**

COVER ILLUSTRATION: CHRIS HIER'S

COLUMNS

6 Patrick J. Buchanan: Victory—easy to spell, hard to define

30 Taki: Gambling with the Saudi royals

NEWS & VIEWS

4 Fourteen Days: Bustamante's skeletons; Dean's "gaffe"; Sullivan's faulty flypaper

ARTICLES

15 Fred Reed: A sympathetic agnostic ponders faith.

20 Joseph Pearce: Graham Greene's struggle to believe

ARTS & LETTERS

23 Steve Sailer: Nicholas Cage puts the "art" in con artist.

24 R.J. Stove: With Puccini, trust the audience not the critics.

26 Jonathan Chaves: Memories of a Cuban boyhood

28 Michael S. Rose: Cracking *The Da Vinci Code*

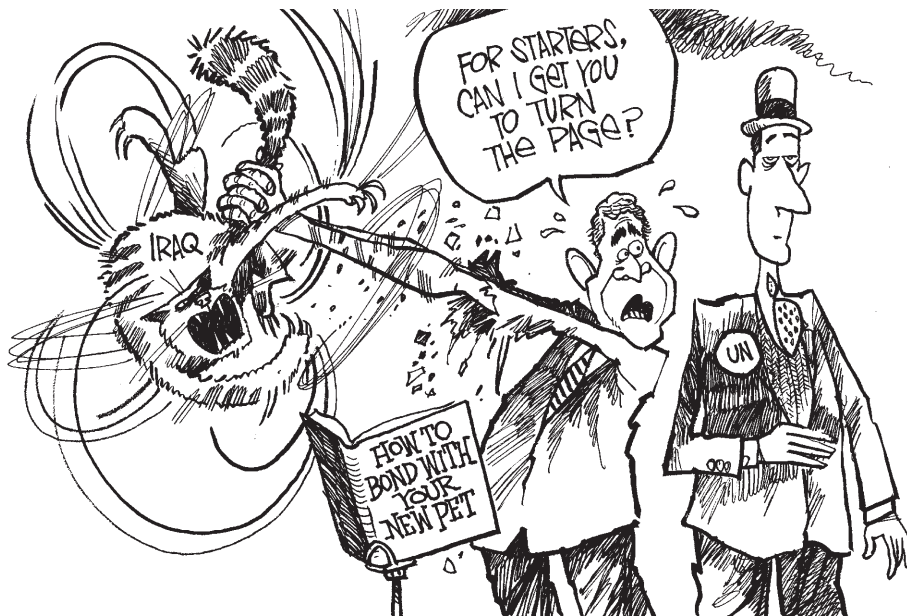
[BELTWAY]

CONTRA-IRAN

Someone in the Defense Department has been taking orders from Michael Ledeen instead of President Bush, and the results threaten to undermine administration policy toward Iran. In August, *Newsday* reported that Pentagon officials, including Ledeen protégé Harold Rhode, had held secret, unauthorized meetings with Iranian expatriates, both shortly after the World Trade Center attacks and again in June of this year. Among those with whom Pentagon officials met was Manucher Ghorbanifar, the famously untrustworthy arms dealer who acted as a go-between in the Iran-contra affair. *Newsday's* source believed that the meetings were aimed at undercutting back-channel talks between the U.S. and Iran.

Now the *Washington Post* has reported that State Department officials have been complaining to the Pentagon about the operations of an Iranian dissident group in Iraq. President Bush had given orders for U.S. forces to disarm and control the Mujaheddin-e Khalq, or "People's Mujaheddin," but it turns out that the group, officially designed as a terrorist organization by State, has not been disarmed and has even been allowed to cross the Iraqi border into Iran to carry out attacks.

These incidents are indicative of more than just a turf war between State and the Pentagon. Elements within the Defense Department seem to be conducting their own foreign policy without the president's knowledge or permission. The reappearance of Ghorbanifar should serve as a warning to the White House that the same kind of people who dragged the Reagan administration down into the Iran-contra scandal are up to their old tricks. President Bush would do well to reassert control over the situation. He might begin by closing down the Pentagon's Northern Gulf Affairs



Office, formerly known as the Office of Special Plans, which has long been a breeding ground for such mischief.

[POLITICS]

GOOD-BYE, COLUMBUS

Cruz Bustamante—California's lieutenant governor and now a fair bet if the recall is held Oct. 7—has what most would call a radical past. As a student at Fresno State in the 1970s, he was a member of MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán), a Latino group that has called for the murder of federal immigration officers and generally supports a radical ethnic agenda including the return of most of the American West to Mexico. (Its symbol is an eagle clutching a dynamite stick and a machete; its Spanish mission statement translates, "For the Race, everything, for those outside the Race, nothing.")

We doubt very much of MEChA's ideology remains in today's Bustamante, a dour and liberal Democrat, and to tell the truth, the ideology of MEChA itself can be taken mostly as sophomoric posturing. But it is remarkable what this tale of Bustamante's past reveals about racial etiquette in today's multicultural America.

A prominent white politician with past ties to a David-Duke-type youth

group (or even a more sober Southern-rights type of group) couldn't run for office without being hounded by reporters' questions about the link, and we doubt simple renunciation would put a stop to the story. But with the exception of one or two Internet columns, Bustamante has been given a free pass by the California media.

A rule holding that a type of association that is ritually condemned in whites is fine and dandy in Hispanics strikes us as a wobbly foundation upon which to build 21st-century America.

[POSTWAR]

BRING 'EM ON

Andrew Sullivan is peddling a conspiracy theory so cold-blooded that its revelation should send his fellow hawks flying in the opposite direction. But far from seeking distance, he struts the genius of a plan—dubbed "Operation Flypaper"—that would make American soldiers bait for a thousand terrorist blows.

Sullivan wrote, "Some time before the Iraq war, I found myself musing out loud to someone close to the inner circles of the Bush administration. ... I voiced some worries about what might happen if an occupied Iraq became a target for international terrorism. Wouldn't U.S. soldiers become sitting ducks?" Came

the answer: "If the terrorists leave us alone in Iraq, fine. ... But if they come and get us, even better." Thus enlightened on the finer points of roping all terrorists into a single corral, Sullivan gushed, "The extra beauty of this strategy is that it creates a target for Islamist terrorists that is not Israel." No sympathy for servicemen caught in the shooting gallery.

It's unlikely that this scheme is true—"bring 'em on" rhetoric notwithstanding. To vindicate its war before the world, the U.S. cannot simultaneously make Iraq a democratic exemplar and a global terrorist trap. But the reaction—far short of logical repulsion—gives an ugly view into the War Party's mindset: chaos is constructive, terrorists are a fixed quantity, and the blood of our soldiers comes cheap.

[ELECTION]

UNFAIRNESS DOCTRINE

One definition of "gaffe" is when a politician inadvertently speaks the truth. Democratic insurgent Howard Dean crossed into gaffe territory when he said, "It's not our place to take sides" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, adding that many Israeli West Bank settlements would have to come out in a final peace deal.

A reduction in settlements is a no-brainer for experts of all ideological stripes who focus on the now moribund peace process. Yet this did not stop Dean rivals Joe Lieberman, Richard Gephardt, and a clique of Democratic Congressmen (mindful, no doubt, of their lifeline of Israel-lobby campaign contributions) from exploding with denunciations of what an awful thing Dean had said.

We wonder what these anti-Dean Democrats think Washington's attitude towards peacemaking in the Holy Land should be. President Clinton came near to forging a final settlement in great part

because of his moving public acknowledgement of Palestinian national aspirations. Any mediator, to get even to first base, would need to win comparable credibility with both sides.

The current Mideast impasse and the seemingly endless Israeli occupation that eventually gave rise to barbaric Palestinian terrorism are festering wounds that have been corroding America's standing in the Mideast for decades and are now an important recruiting tools for anti-American terrorists. The Democrats' expression of shock at the idea that a peacemaker must strive for fairness calls into question their own fitness for elective office.

[ECONOMICS]

THE BOMBAY COMPANY

Last spring, the *New York Times* reported that American food-stamp recipients, unbeknownst to them, were having their inquiries answered by operators in Bombay. No isolated incident, this is part of a widening phenomenon that, according to some estimates, will ship 3.3 million American jobs overseas by 2015.

In his Labor Day speech, President Bush promised a new administration position to stem the employment export—about 700,000 jobs last year. Perhaps he should have first checked his own party's position on outsourcing, for it seems the RNC has interests in India. *The Business Standard* reports from New Delhi, "The U.S. Republican Party now has a band of young and enthusiastic fundraisers in Noida and Gurgaon. ... These operators are required to call up people in the U.S. seeking their support for President George W. Bush and a donation to the Republican cause."

What are the odds one of those 75 Indians dialing for dollars will ask for a contribution from an American whose job they're doing? Increasingly high, if trends continue apace. ■

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The American Conservative, Vol. 2, No. 19, October 6, 2003 (ISSN 1540-966X). AC is published 24 times per year, biweekly (except for double issues in January and August) for \$49.97 per year by The American Conservative, LLC, 1300 Wilson Blvd, Suite 120, Arlington VA, 22209. (703) 875-7600. Periodicals postage pending at Arlington, VA, and additional mailing offices. Printed in the United States of America. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The American Conservative*, P.O. Box 99010, Collingswood, NJ 08108-0612.

Subscription rates: \$49.97 per year (24 issues) in the U.S., \$54.97 in Canada (U.S. funds), and \$69.97 other foreign (U.S. funds). Back issues: \$6.00 (prepaid) per copy in USA, \$7.00 in Canada (U.S. funds). For subscription orders, payments, and other subscription inquiries—by mail: *The American Conservative*, P.O. Box 99010, Collingswood, NJ 08108-0612. By phone: 800-579-6148 (outside the U.S./Canada call 856-488-5321). Via the web: www.amconmag.com. When ordering a subscription please allow 4–6 weeks for delivery of your first issue and all subscription transactions. This issue went to press on September 18, 2003. Copyright 2003 *The American Conservative*. Inquiries to the editor should be sent to letters@amconmag.com.

What is Victory?

Exasperated, Rush Limbaugh spelled out for his caller America's goal in Iraq. "It's a seven-letter word," roared Rush. It "begins with 'v' and ends in 'y.'"

"Define victory," the caller retorted. Rush went to a break.

Excellent question. How do we know when we've won the war in Iraq? How do we define victory?

We know who we are fighting against—Ba'athists, jihadists, unreconstructed Saddam-loyalists, America-haters. But what are we fighting for?

"Freedom," comes the retort, "democracy." But Iraq is already free of Saddam. And what do we mean by democracy? If it means one-man, one-vote majority rule, Iraq will be governed by a Shi'ite majority that looks to Iran for inspiration and guidance.

Is that worth \$87 billion and a daily toll of American dead?

Some of us would settle for an Iraq free of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, where no attack on America is planned and no terror plot by al-Qaeda is tolerated. But it now appears—after four months of inspections by a 1,400-man Anglo-American team—that that is what we had under Saddam Hussein.

What the enemy is fighting for seems far less gauzy. His goal: expel the Americans from Iraq. If we cannot define victory, our enemy can. And it is a sobering thought that no Arab or Islamic revolution that fought hard to expel a Western power has been defeated in 60 years.

The French were run out of Algeria after an eight-year war, and the allies they left behind were slaughtered. The Russians were expelled from Afghanistan after an eight-year occupation by

an Islamic *jihad* and nationalist uprising. The Israelis abandoned Lebanon after an 18-year occupation, unwilling to pay the continuing cost in Jewish blood of battling Hezbollah guerrillas.

Moreover, pro-Western monarchs in that part of the world—King Farouk in Egypt in 1952, King Feisel in Iraq in 1958, King Idris in Libya in 1968, Emperor Haile Selassie in Ethiopia in 1975, the Shah of Iran in 1979—have all been overthrown in anti-Western coups.

Thus, while there are many models for how a Western power can be driven out of an Arab country, or a Western vassal overthrown, where is the model for an enduring Western victory in the Arab and Islamic world—in the last 50 years?

Kuwait, 1991, appears the best example. What were the elements of the triumph of Bush I in Desert Storm? First, his goal was to liberate an Arab nation, Kuwait, from an invading power. Second, he had the support of almost all Arab regimes. Arab troops from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Syria even fought alongside Americans. Yet, even then, the "Arab Street" seemed to side with Saddam. In this new war, however, Bush II suffers drawbacks his father did not.

First, America has never been so widely hated in the Arab world.

Second, the U.S. war on Iraq is seen in the Islamic world as a war of aggression waged on falsified charges that Saddam's Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and played a role in Sept. 11.

Third, where the U.S. was on the offensive in Desert Storm and in Operation Iraqi Freedom, we are now on the defensive. It is we who are the occupying power. Ours is the detested presence in an Arab capital.

Moreover, the tactics being used by the enemy are the same tactics used against the French in Algeria and the Israelis on the West Bank. Assassinate collaborators with terror attacks, such as on the UN headquarters and Jordanian embassy. Sting and infuriate the occupier by killing his soldiers, provoking him into lashing out and wounding and killing non-combatants, or even allies, like the Iraqi police in Fallujah. Thus, radicalize the people and polarize the nation between collaborators who side with the Americans and patriots and nationalists who gravitate to the resistance. Thus do we convert a terror war into a guerrilla war into a people's war. And down that long bloody road lies victory: the expulsion of the Americans and a regime of their own choosing.

It is the formula used by anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements from the Irish in 1919-1921, to the Irgun in Palestine, to the Mau Mau in Kenya, to the FALN in Algeria, to ZANU and ZAPU in Rhodesia, to the ANC in South Africa, to Hezbollah in Lebanon, to Hamas on the West Bank. The only way such movements have been defeated—in Puerto Rico in the 1950s and El Salvador in the 1980s—was when the Western power was able to enlist nationalism on its side.

In Iraq, we have not yet done that. Indeed, we appear to be losing the battle for hearts and minds. Nonetheless, to quote Dean Rusk, "We are there and we are committed." ■

[none dare call it quagmire]

The Cost of Empire

President Bush's war policy marks the beginning of the end of America's era of global dominance.

By Christopher Layne

THE ADMINISTRATION'S U-turn decision to ask for United Nations help in Iraq, and President George W. Bush's request that Congress appropriate \$87 billion to fund the occupation and reconstruction of that country send a very clear message: the administration's Iraq policy is a fiasco. And a foreseeable one at that.

U.S. intelligence agencies predicted that American troops occupying Iraq would not be welcomed as liberators but would be resisted. A pre-invasion State Department report warned that the administration had the proverbial snowball's chance of transforming Iraq into a Western-style democracy (a conclusion reinforced by a recent Zogby poll of Iraqis that found only 38 percent of Iraqis favor democracy, while 50 percent believe that "democracy is a western way of doing things and it will not work here"). Similarly, it was obvious that the administration's go-it-alone hubris, combined with its sledgehammer diplomacy, would chill Washington's relations with the other major pow-

ers and trigger a worldwide backlash of hostility toward the United States.

Those—here and abroad—who opposed Washington's reckless march to war can say we told you so. But that is not the point. More than that, it is necessary to step back from day-to-day events and place the Iraq war in the context of its longer-term significance for the United States. A good place to start is by asking why the administration embarked on war while ignoring widespread—and accurate—predictions that even a successful military campaign could lead to postwar disaster. In other words, what were the administration's war aims?

We know what they were not. Iraq was not an imminent threat to the security of the Middle East and Persian Gulf. (Did anyone say "weapons of mass destruction"?) And—the administration's manipulation of public opinion notwithstanding—Saddam Hussein was not involved in Sept. 11 and was not in bed with al-Qaeda. But, as both U.S. and British intelligence warned, by going to war with Iraq, the administration has

created a terrorist threat where none existed previously, making the U.S. less, not more, secure than it would have been had we not invaded Iraq.

The real reason the administration went to war had nothing to do with terrorism. Indeed, many of the administration's architects of illusion—Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, and Richard Perle, among others—put Iraq squarely in their geopolitical crosshairs while they were out of power during the 1990s. The administration went to war in Iraq to consolidate America's global hegemony and to extend U.S. dominance to the Middle East by establishing a permanent military stronghold in Iraq for the purposes of controlling the Middle Eastern oil spigot (thereby giving Washington enormous leverage in its relations with Western Europe and China); allowing Washington to distance itself from an increasingly unreliable and unstable Saudi Arabia; and using the shadow of U.S. military power to bring about additional regime changes in Iran and Syria.

It is fashionable to say that 9/11—and

the subsequent war with Iraq—“changed everything.” But this is not true. Before Sept. 11 the biggest debate among students of international politics and analysts of U.S. foreign policy was about American hegemony. Re-christened as a debate about the wisdom of American empire, it still is. The big fault line in this debate is over which of two theories—yes, academic theories about international relations really do reflect and influence real-world policy—about how states can best attain security for themselves in the competitive arena of world politics is correct.

“Offensive realism” holds that the best way for a state to gain security is to amass overwhelming power—that is, by becoming a hegemon. In plain English, being a hegemon means being like Leroy Brown—badder than old King Kong and meaner than a junkyard dog. A hegemon can use its power to eliminate rivals—by conquering them, co-opting them, or intimidating them—and seek to create a congenial world order that reflects its own ideology, values, and preferences. Since World War II, offensive realism has undergirded American grand strategy, although the current administration’s policy is offensive realism on steroids.

IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS **BENEVOLENT HEGEMONS** ARE LIKE UNICORNS—THERE ARE **NO SUCH ANIMALS**. HEGEMONS LOVE THEMSELVES, BUT OTHERS **MISTRUST AND FEAR THEM**.

If the Duchess of Windsor had been an administration strategist she would have said that the U.S. can never be too rich, too powerful—or too well-armed or too willing to employ force against its adversaries.

Hegemony is a superficially appealing grand strategy. After all, if power counts in international politics—and every real-

ist knows it counts big time—then it seemingly makes sense for the U.S. to grab as much power as possible.

Traditional realists like Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan, and Walter Lippman reject the logic of offensive realism because they believe that when one state becomes too powerful all the others fear for their security. They respond by building up their own military capabilities or by forming alliances with others to act as a counterweight against a hegemon’s power (or both). This is what students of international politics refer to as “balancing.” And, indeed, the historical record pretty conclusively shows that hegemony is a self-defeating grand strategy, not a winning one. Every hegemonic aspirant in modern international history—the Hapsburg Empire under Charles V, Spain under Philip II, France under Louis XIV and Napoleon, and Germany under Hitler—has been defeated by counter-hegemonic balancing.

American policymakers have come up with a number of (far too) clever rationales to convince themselves that the U.S. will escape the fate that invariably befalls hegemons. For example, they claim that the United States is a dif-

ferent kind of hegemon—a “benign” or “benevolent” one that is non-threatening because it acts altruistically in international politics and because others are attracted to America’s “soft power” (its political institutions and values, and its culture). There is no reason, they say, for others to balance against the United States. Other proponents of American

hegemony take a different tack: they claim that the United States can throw its hegemonic weight around as it pleases because its power—economic, military, and technological—is so overwhelming that it will be a very long time before other states can even think about balancing against the U.S.

These are not compelling arguments. In international politics, benevolent hegemons are like unicorns—there are no such animals. Hegemons love themselves, but others mistrust and fear them. Others dread both the over-concentration of geopolitical weight in America’s favor and the purposes for which it may be used. Washington’s (purportedly) benevolent intentions are ephemeral, but the hard fist of American power is tangible—and others worry that if U.S. intentions change, they might get smacked. As for the argument that the U.S. is too mighty to be counter-balanced, history reminds us that things change fast in international politics. The British found out toward the end of the 19th century that a seemingly unassailable international power position can melt away with unexpected rapidity.

Perhaps the proponents of America’s imperial ambitions are right and the U.S. will not suffer the same fate as previous hegemonic powers. Don’t bet on it. The very fact of America’s overwhelming power is bound to produce a geopolitical backlash—which is why it’s only a short step from the celebration of imperial glory to the recession of imperial power. Indeed, on its present course, the United States seems fated to succumb to the “hegemon’s temptation.” Hegemons have lots of power and because there is no countervailing force to stop them, they are tempted to use it repeatedly, and thereby overreach themselves. Over time, this hegemonic muscle-flexing has a price. The cumulative costs of fighting—or preparing to fight—guerilla wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, asymmetric



CHRIS HIEBS

conflicts against terrorists (in the Philippines, possibly in a failed Pakistan, and elsewhere), regional powers (Iran, North Korea), and rising great powers like China could erode America's relative power—especially if the U.S. suffers setbacks in future conflicts, for example in a war with China over Taiwan.

At the end of the day, hegemonic decline results from a combination of external and internal factors: over-extension abroad (imperial overstretch) and domestic economic weakness (endless budget and balance-of-payments deficits). It comes as no surprise that the imperial overstretch debate of the late 1980s—about the costs of empire and America's ability to afford them—which was aborted by the Soviet Union's sudden collapse, has re-emerged with a vengeance. And there is ample reason to

worry about whether the U.S. can sustain the burdens of hegemony. A recent report commissioned by the U.S. Treasury Department, but buried by the Bush administration, pointed out the magnitude of the fiscal crisis confronting the U.S. in funding health care and pension commitments to the rapidly aging "baby boom" generation. As Niall Ferguson and Laurence Kotlikoff suggest in an important article in the Fall 2003 issue of the *National Interest*, the looming imperative of achieving fiscal solvency through a combination of painful tax increases and spending cuts eventually will spur the realization that America's imperial ambitions are unaffordable. Over time, America's fiscal troubles will erode its economic power—which is the foundation of its military might—and, as the relative

power gap between the U.S. and potential new great powers begins to shrink, the costs and risks of challenging the United States will decrease and the payoff for doing so will increase.

American policymakers should want to avoid the fate of hegemons. In the late 1890s, Great Britain—widely regarded as at the zenith of its hegemonic power—had its own counterpart to American unilateralism: splendid isolation. But as speculation grew that the other European great powers would form a coalition to balance against Britain, London realized its isolation was far from splendid. As the British military analyst Spencer Wilkinson said the time, "We have no friends, and no nation loves us." A recent *New York Times* article on other nations' perceptions of the U.S. suggests that it is not

much of a leap to conclude that, because of its hegemonic strategy, the U.S. risks facing the nightmare scenario depicted by Wilkenson.

The administration, however, is not worried because it believes that American hegemony is an unchallengeable fact of international life. But this does not hold up because the rest of the world draws the opposite conclusion: that the United States is too powerful, and its hegemony must be resisted. The administration has dug the U.S. into a deep hole in Iraq and, more worryingly, in terms of its relations with the rest of the world. So, what is to be done?

Realists have tried to do something. Nearly every major realist scholar of international politics in the U.S. opposed going to war with Iraq. No surprise here. During Vietnam, realists like Kennan, Morgenthau, and Kenneth Waltz were among the first—and most prescient—in warning that the war would become a quagmire that would undermine, rather than further, U.S. interests.

While understanding the ineluctable role of power in international politics, realists also understand that military force is a blunt instrument and that its use often has unforeseeable consequences. While understanding that unilateralism is the default strategic option for great

imperial ambitions, a new group called the Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy is organizing to push for a more prudent U.S. strategy. Composed of leading realist scholars from academe, think-tank analysts, and mainstream members of the political establishment, the

NEARLY EVERY MAJOR REALIST SCHOLAR OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS IN THE U.S. OPPOSED GOING TO WAR WITH IRAQ.

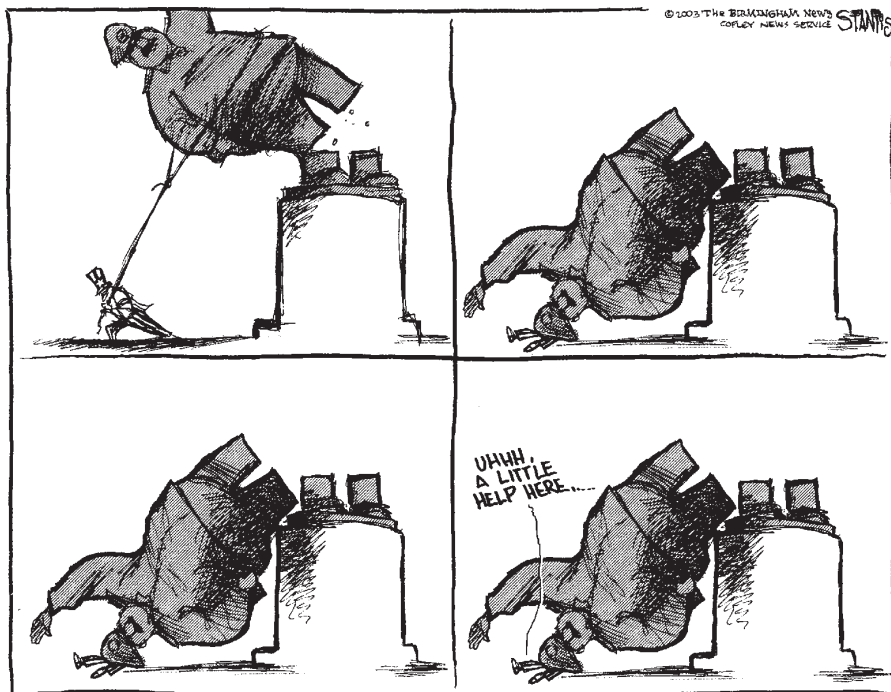
powers, realists also know that, when possible, it is best to work with others (especially in the real war on terrorism, which cannot be won by the U.S. without the co-operation of other states). Realists also know that it is foolish to antagonize other states needlessly or to destroy institutional frameworks of co-operation through which the U.S. can work with others to advance its own interests.

Now that the Iraqi debacle has underscored the risks of the administration's

Coalition is a group that transcends partisan and ideological divides. It is united by the "desire to turn American national security policy toward realistic and sustainable measures for protecting U.S. vital interests in a manner that is consistent with American values." Perhaps as the 2004 presidential campaign unfolds, someone like a Howard Dean or a Wesley Clark will recognize the virtue of reaching across party lines to staff a foreign-policy team dedicated to reconstructing American foreign policy on a sounder, non-imperial basis.

One thing is certain: unless the call for the United States to exercise self-imposed grand-strategic restraint is heeded, the rest of the world will act to impose that constraint on Washington. If that happens, the Bush administration will not be remembered for conquering Baghdad but rather for a policy that shattered the pillars of the international security framework that the United States established after World War II, galvanized both hard and soft balancing against U.S. hegemony, and marked the beginning of the end of America's era of global preponderance. For this, it must be held accountable. ■

Christopher Layne writes frequently about U.S. foreign policy and is a member of the Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy.



I Was Wrong

A repentant warblogger sheaths his sword.

By Jack Strocchi

HAVE YOU EVER made a universal and eternal fool of yourself? The Internet offers wonderful opportunities to immortalize intellectual folly. My recent chastening experience as a pro-war blogger has made me realize that I am not cut out to offer strategic advice to statesmen. The worrying thing is that this advice applies equally to the current folk who hold those positions.

Before I join the orgy of recriminations at the Bush administration for leading us into the Iraqi flytrap, I must first engage in a bit of self-flagellation. I have been well and truly conned, by my dumb self and devious others, about the second Gulf War's economy of means and attainability of ends. The war was built on a series of falsehoods, propagated by neocon-artists and swallowed by Suckers R Us.

The best lies are laced with a tincture of truth, so I must concede that the war did generate some bright spots. Hussein & Sons were run out of power—almost. It appears that Saddam is still pulling the strings somewhere around the Sunni Triangle. The cities of Basra and Baghdad are enjoying municipal democracy—sort of. The U.S. is not happy with the tendency of Iraqis to elect fundamentalist clerics and is instead handpicking administrators. Iraqi oil fields are being developed for Iraqi civic benefit—but not quite yet. A *Washington Post* headline gloomily proclaimed, "Iraq Is Ill-Equipped to Exploit Huge Oil Reserves."

Figuring out a well-intentioned plan is one thing. Making it work is another,

and judged by this standard, the invasion and occupation of Iraq can now be considered a failure. Witness Jack Straw, Britain's foreign secretary whose pull-no-punches report to Tony Blair concluded: we are at risk of strategic failure in Iraq.

This late-breaking wisdom is a good sign, but I fear the Owl of Minerva has already had its wings clipped.

It is now clear that, far from promoting U.S. strategic objectives, the Bush administration has actually gone backwards on stated war aims.

There was no Islamist problem in Iraq before, but there is one now. Rather than deterring fundamentalist terrorism, occupying another Holy Land has effectively launched a U.S.-sponsored recruiting drive for Islamic terrorists. Elements of the terrorist organization Ansar al-Islam have moved into Baghdad, Islamic jihadists were infiltrating

that disarmament leads to a war." America's postwar woes have strengthened North Korea's bargaining position to the extent that we now have to enlist our old adversary, the People's Republic of China, in an attempt to keep the Axis of Evil from spinning off a wheel.

The postwar period has also failed to create a new "dynamic of peace" in the Middle East, although it has added some exciting new forms of civil instability. Palestinians have not been impressed with U.S.-backed regime changes. The attempt to banish Arafat, their long-time leader, has made them quite cross. They have started their suicide bombings again, and the chief navigator for the road map to peace has quit in disgust.

The U.S. also made a few ... process errors in its preamble to the war. It's hard to fight international terrorism when one treats allies with contempt by launching a pre-emptive war, which sets

FAR FROM PROMOTING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, THE ADMINISTRATION HAS ACTUALLY GONE BACKWARDS ON STATED WAR AIMS.

Iraq from Syria, and some of these folks were probably behind the various car bombings that have enlivened urban Iraq over the past few months.

There were no WMD found in Iraq, but WMD proliferation continues apace at the other end of the evil axis. Pyongyang's state-run newspaper pointed out the obvious truth, "The Iraqi war proved

a bad military precedent; lying about WMD, which destroys public trust in a democracy; sidestepping the UN Security Council, which mocks international law; and trashing Old European allies, which disables security alliances. All these things may turn around, or somehow magically fix themselves, although I doubt it.

What cannot be denied about this war is its astronomical cost. I should have known better. I have practiced as an economist, and economists like Professors William Nordhaus and John Quiggin raised the cost alarm before the war. Their mid-range estimate was that the Iraq military and civil enterprise would cost about \$100 billion, with a likely duration of five years. But I cheerfully ignored their dire warnings about the recklessness of buying into a dilapidated piece of political real estate with eyes wide shut.

The penny dropped when the bills started to flow in. Iraq has turned from a renovator's dream into a money pit. The *New York Times* reports that the total costs of the war, occupation, and reconstruction are likely to be nearly \$500 billion. This "news" gave me a bad case of sticker-shock and awe, at both the magnitude of the war's expense and my folly for

supporting it. The author, Donald Hepburn, an adviser to the Middle East Policy Council, takes a certain amount of sadistic relish in itemizing the costly entries. First there was the cost of the war, "the cost of preparation, aid to noncombatant allies, and the invasion itself amounted to \$45 billion." Then there is the occupation, "Assuming a five-year occupation, that's some \$300 billion." Then finally, there is the cost of reconstruction, "the total bill is likely to be at least \$200 billion over a decade." A few hundred billion here, a few hundred billion there, and soon we are talking real money.

I can't say I was not warned. My blog-gurus on both the Left and the Right opposed the war and doubted the sums and schemes of the neocon planners. In the future I will be more cautious before attempting to teach them how to suck intellectual eggs.

I would also like to issue a series of formal apologies to all those adversely affected by my ignorant and arrogant blogs, nagging comments, and unsolicited e-mails. They include my social-democratic alter ego, for ignoring his repeated warnings never to trust crypto-Trotskyists; sundry bloggers, for my excruciatingly long-winded and torturous comments; my few remaining political friends, who have tolerated my behavior with saintly patience; the Internet, for wasting valuable cyberspace. Finally, I owe an apology to the Iraqi people for any inconvenience caused by my urging on of the recent hail of precision-guided, high-explosive ordnance targeted at their land.

There remains the mystery: why did I do it? If I am any guide, I would say that the War Party acted from a mixture of motives and reasons. First, hazy personal psychology: my vindictiveness was directed at a convenient scapegoat for 9/11 and assorted unmoved Leftists. Second, lazy professional pathology: a failure to exercise due diligence in the accounting for likely costs. Third, crazy political ideology: the utopian hope that wholesale violence in the Middle East would somehow make Arabic people want to copy our way of life and allow the United States triumphantly to make the world over.

Whatever the cause, it remains the case that this writer has considerable empathy with another punch-drunk pugilist who asked for a fight and got what he deserved:

*I have squandered my resistance,
For a pocketful of mumbles, such are
promises.
All lies and jest.
Still a man hears what he wants to
hear and disregards the rest. ■*

Jack Strocchi is a former warblogger who contributes to <http://catallaxyfiles.blogspot.com>.

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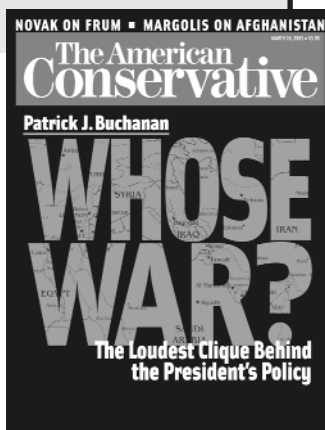
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An Empire—If You Can Keep It

A British academic thinks *Pax Americana* may have universal appeal.

By Dominic Lieven

IT IS SUDDENLY FASHIONABLE to talk about American empire. It was always fashionable to do so in left-wing circles outside the U.S. What is new is that mainstream discussion in university international-relations departments is now accepting the concept, and so are many American newspaper and political pundits.

If calling the U.S. an empire makes any sense, it is in the context of the power that has always been required to sustain great civilizations. It is above all American power that has secured the triumph of democracy and liberal capitalism over its vicious 20th-century rivals, communism and fascism. It will remain American power that will play the biggest part in sustaining this order in the foreseeable future.

The Bush administration's claim that Iraq represented a major threat to U.S. security or the contemporary global order was hugely exaggerated. But the fear that weapons of mass destruction (first biological, then chemical, and possibly even nuclear) will probably be in private hands within a generation or two and will then pose a threat to our civilization is justified. Shifts in military technology have brought down previous empires and civilizations. Ours could follow. The defense of imperial

civilizations can demand ruthlessness. It always requires political skill. The key to combating private bioterror will be the collaboration of the world's intelligence services and therefore of the states that control them. As was the case with every successful empire in history, to survive, the United States needs loyal allies and clients.

Failure to remember this helps to explain the mess in Iraq. The U.S. went in virtually alone, with no meaningful international allies, save Britain. It lacked reliable local clients, partly because few Iraqis believe that America has the staying power to bear the costs of direct imperial rule for any length of time. Meanwhile, the unfortunate British army, having just about escaped from its last post-imperial conflict in Ireland, finds itself trying to preserve order in Iraq, always one of its least easily policed colonies. In addition, the British are a fifth wheel on an American landrover whose driver doesn't appear to have a local map and that is operating in territory where anything America does (however benign in intention) is bound to be deeply suspect.

Thinking in terms of American empire is useful because it helps one to understand the realities of power in the contemporary world. Past empires dif-

fered enormously in the impact they made on the everyday lives of the peoples they governed. In some cases, subject peoples were nearly exterminated. In others, ordinary people barely noted empire's existence. Most Indian peasants never saw an Englishman, though by the standards of many empires the British penetrated quite deeply into Indian society, culture, and economy.

Today, American power pierces foreign cultures much more deeply than most imperial regimes ever did. The integrated global economy and U.S. television reach almost every village, challenging existing values, customs, and vested interests. The challenge may often be a force for progress—for instance, as regards life chances of women—but this will not necessarily make it popular among those who count in political terms. Nor will it necessarily differentiate America from past empires, some of which also brought progress in their wake.

For many foreigners, ever-present, uninvited, and intrusive American power is seen as imperialist. This is bound to bewilder most Americans who have never consciously chosen the path of empire and yet are caught up in its toils. American prosperity is now inexorably linked with integration into the global

economy, but this can have unpleasant results even for many Americans. Loathing of mass immigration, the uncertainties of fluctuating global markets, and the vast wealth of financial oligarchs were reasons the first great wave of globalization (roughly 1850-1929) ended in paranoid nationalism and even genocide.

Though most Americans have no doubts about the universal superiority of their individualist, materialist, and

own citizens. It can be ruthless in its treatment of outsiders or minorities whose interests may conflict with its own. Political thinkers of the Italian Renaissance argued that outsiders fared much better under a prince than as subjects of a republic of citizens. They sometimes had a point.

The most democratic nations in the 19th century were the English-speaking colonies. They were also more ruthless in their treatment of natives than was

are and how infallible our system (democracy) is: the reality behind the current myth that democracies will never fight each other. Intelligent monarchs took all this flattery with a pinch of salt and got on with the grubby business of ruling real peoples.

In historical perspective, the most worrying aspect of the present global set-up is its uncertainty. The world is changing so quickly that it is difficult to predict from where the most dangerous challenges will come. The problem with inequality is that the official ideology of the present global order is democratic and egalitarian, but we live in a world that in many ways is more unequal than it was in 1500, when explicitly non-egalitarian ideologies were everywhere dominant. The history of empire suggests trouble when ideology and reality diverge as sharply as they do at present.

America has the potential to sustain empire's burdens. It is in one sense the heir to the Dutch and British empires, for they did most to build the foundations of contemporary global capitalism and democracy. But Britain and the Netherlands were small countries without the resources to sustain their global role. The U.S. is a continental-scale power with vast economic resources. The British and Dutch were also tight ethno-national communities, deeply unwilling to assimilate the peoples they ruled into their own society and elites. In this they were quite unlike many great land empires. Even by the second century AD, for example, most Roman senators were no longer Roman, and many emperors were not even Italian. American identity, in the best tradition of empire, is rooted in culture and ideology. Much more than any other country in today's world, it has a potentially universal appeal.

At present the United States is roughly where Britain was in 1825. After a century of war against France, the British

AMERICANS ARE STUCK WITH A MODERN VERSION OF EMPIRE. THE BEST POLICY IS TO LEARN FROM HISTORY AND MANAGE IMPERIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AT MINIMUM COST.

populist culture, not all foreigners share this view. Muslims are only one example of the doubters, but an important one that illustrates the particular problems of empire in an increasingly interdependent world. Islamic fundamentalists attacked the Ottoman and British empires in the past, but technology only allowed them to strike these empires' periphery. Now they can get on air-planes and strike New York and Washington. Frontier walls never protected empires adequately. Today they are mostly useless.

To a great extent, Americans are stuck with a modern version of empire—at which point the best policy is to learn from history and manage imperial responsibilities at minimum cost.

A way to start is by remembering that, historically, empire at its best sustained most of the world's greatest civilizations, enabled goods and ideas to travel in peace across vast regions, and was remarkably tolerant of diverse cultures. Nor was empire's nemesis, the democratic nation, always virtuous. Democracy exists to serve the interests of its

the norm under empire. Algerian natives did better under Napoleon III than under the French Third Republic: the latter proclaimed the virtues of democracy, and then proceeded to divide up Algeria's lands among its own (French) citizens. Contemporary technology and cultural trends, not to mention the workings of the liberal economy, mean that we do to a considerable extent live in a single global community. The realities of power mean that most of the First-World electorates are citizens of this community, while most Third-World populations risk being no more than subjects. It is an illusion to think that democracy in the First World is any guarantee of Third-World interests. Nor is democracy within the Third World a guarantee against international conflict.

In any polity the sovereign is subjected to a great deal of flattery. Under monarchy much effort went into telling the king that he and the polity over which he ruled were models of benevolence. We, the people, are the sovereigns in a democracy. Politicians, marketers, and publicists tell us how virtuous we

dominated the seas and the global economy. Similarly, after preserving its united continental base in the 1860s, the U.S. went on to eliminate its main foreign rivals in the 20th century. The two world wars and the U.S. Civil War were truly imperial conflicts in their scale, their implications, and their casualties. For almost a century after Waterloo, the British ran an empire on the cheap. They suffered the occasional setback and fought many imperial police actions. The current American imperial police actions are Iraq and Afghanistan, its major setback thus far the attack on the Twin Towers. By the standards of empire they are small beer—a horrible idea to contemplate when one has watched the awful suffering of Sept. 11 but unfortunately a true one.

In time the price of empire will grow, as it did for the British by the end of the 19th century. Above all, this entailed the emergence of foreign challenges to British global hegemony. At present, the U.S. faces no potential challengers. The European Union is its only peer and this in just one aspect of power—commerce. Europe is very unlikely ever to be a challenger in military and political terms, and in any case it shares huge common interests with the United States. China might one day be a rival but not for many years to come. For the moment, therefore, the U. S. is unchallengeable, and its ruling elites can afford to make many mistakes and wallow in a good deal of self-indulgence.

But dangers ignored now could exact a high price in 50 years' time. I hope not. Otherwise American empire and with it any sort of global order could disintegrate over my own grandchildren's heads. ■

Dominic Lieven is a professor of Russian government at the London School of Economics. His latest book is Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals.

Benefit of the Doubt

Good questions are better than bad answers.

By Fred Reed

WE LIVE IN A wantonly irreligious age—at least at the level of public discourse. In America the courts, the schools, and the government seek to cleanse the country of religion. More accurately, they seek to cleanse it of Christianity. We are told, never directly but by relentless implication, that religious faith is something one in decency ought to do behind closed doors—an embarrassment, worse than public bowling though not quite as bad as having a venereal disease. Which is odd.

I do not offer myself as one intimate with the gods, and on grounds of reason would be hard pressed to choose between the views of Hindus and those of Buddhists. I note, however, that over millennia people of extraordinary intellect and thoughtfulness have taken religion seriously. A quite remarkable arrogance is needed to feel oneself mentally superior to Augustine, Aquinas, Isaac Newton, and C.S. Lewis. I'm not up to it.

Of course arrogance comes in forms both personal and temporal. People tend to regard their own time as wiser and more knowing than all preceding times and the people of earlier ages as quaint and vaguely primitive. Thus many who do not know how a television works will feel superior to Newton because he didn't know how a television works. (Here is a fascinating concept: arrogance by proximity to a television.)

The world is too much with us. The nature of modernity itself engenders loss of attention to other than the pedes-

trian and merely technical. In the vast silence of the Alaskan woods in winter, or on the beach of a remote Pacific island with the waves booming endlessly in, one senses dimly something that is above our pay grade. It is harder in climate-controlled living rooms with olefin carpets and the box singing of new improved whatever that will give life meaning by making our counters spotless. The pathological sterility of the shopping mall does not conduce to reflection. And so we focus on the here and now—the problem with this being that we are only here now.

It will be said that we have learned much since the time of Newton, and that this knowledge renders us wiser on matters spiritual. We do have better plastics. Yet still we die and have no idea what it means. We do not know where we came from, and no amount of pious mummery about Big Bangs and black holes changes that at all. We do not know why we are here. We have intimations of what we should do but no assurance. These are the questions that religion addresses and that science pretends do not exist. For all our transistors we know no more about these matters than did Heraclitus—and think about them less.

Many today do know of the questions and do think about them. One merely doesn't bring them up at a cocktail party, as they are held to be disreputable.

Yet I often meet a—to me—curious sort of fellow who simply cannot com-

prehend what religion might be about. He is puzzled as distinct from contemptuous or haughty. He genuinely sees no difference between religious faith and believing that the earth is flat. He is like a congenitally deaf man watching a symphony orchestra: with all the good will in the world he doesn't see the profit in all that sawing with bows and blowing into things.

This fellow is very different from the common atheist, who is bitter, proud of his advanced thinking, and inclined toward a (somewhat adolescent) hostility to a world that isn't up to his standard. This is tiresome and predictable but doesn't offend me. Less forgivably, he often wants to run on about logical positivism. (I'm reminded of Orwell's comment about "the sort of atheist who does not so much disbelieve in God as personally dislike him.")

Critics of religion say, correctly, that horrible crimes are committed in the name of religion. So are they in the name of communism, anti-communism, Manifest Destiny, Zionism, nationalism, and national security. Horrible crimes are what people do. They are not the heart of the thing.

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The following seems to me to be true regarding religion and the sciences: either one believes that there is an afterlife or one believes that there is not an afterlife or one isn't sure—which means that one believes that there may be an afterlife.

If there is an afterlife, then there is an aspect of existence about which we

those who think themselves Christians have subordinated God to physics. For example, I have often read some timid theologian saying that manna was actually a sticky secretion deriving from certain insects and that the crossing of the Red Sea was really done in a shallow place when the wind blew the water out.

WE DO NOT KNOW WHERE WE CAME FROM, AND NO AMOUNT OF PIOUS MUMMERY ABOUT BIG BANGS AND BLACK HOLES CHANGES THAT AT ALL.

know nothing and which may, or may not, influence this world. In this case the sciences, while interesting and useful, are merely a partial explanation of things. Thus to believe in the absolute explanatory power of the sciences one must be an atheist—to exclude competition. Atheists, of course, believe what they cannot establish as much as the faithful.

Here is the chief defect of scientists (I mean those who take the sciences as an ideology rather than as a discipline): an unwillingness to admit that there is anything outside their realm. But there is. You cannot squeeze consciousness, beauty, affection, or Good and Evil from physics any more than you can derive momentum from the postulates of geometry: no mass, no momentum. A moral scientist is thus a contradiction in terms. (Logically speaking—in practice they compartmentalize and behave as well as anyone else.)

Thus we have the spectacle of the scientist who is horrified by the latest hatchet murder but can give no scientific reason why. A murder, after all, is merely the dislocation of certain physical masses (the victim's head, for example) followed by elaborate chemical reactions. Horror cannot be derived from physics. It comes from somewhere else.

Similarly, those who believe in religions often do not really quite believe. Interesting to me is the extent to which

Perhaps. I wasn't there. Yet this amounts to saying that God is all-powerful, provided that he behaves consistently with physical principles and prevailing weather. Science takes precedence.

Now, people who seek (and therefore find) an overarching explanation of everything always avoid looking at the logical warts and lacunae in their systems. This is equally true of Christians, liberals, conservatives, Marxists, evolutionists, and believers in the universal explanatory power of the sciences. Any ideology can probably be described as a systematic way of misunderstanding the world.

That being said, at worst the religions of the earth are gropings toward something people feel but cannot put a finger on, toward something more at the heart of life than the hoped-for raise, trendy restaurants, and the next and grander automobile. And few things are as stultifying and superficial as the man not so much agnostic (this I can understand) as simply inattentive, whose life is focused on getting into a better country club. Good questions are better than bad answers. And the sciences, though not intended to be, have become the opiate of the masses. ■

Fred Reed's writing has appeared in the Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Harper's, and National Review, among other places.

Zionism: A Defense

A prominent conservative argues that cultural and political kinship make Israel the West's natural ally.

By Peter Hitchens

CONSERVATIVES SHOULD SUPPORT the State of Israel on principle, just as the globalist Left seeks to defeat Zionism on principle. The legions of political correctness would usually approve of a state founded as the result of a classic “national liberation” struggle against a classic “colonial oppressor” and ought to endorse a country so profoundly secular in so many of its institutions and so dominated by social-democratic political and cultural thinking. Especially, they should be enthusiastic about a nation whose whole reason for existence is profoundly anti-racist.

But they don't and they aren't. The Left will readily forgive Irish Republicans for terror and even for Catholicism. They remain sentimental about Fidel Castro despite the show trials and the dungeons. They will pardon South Africa almost everything, including an incorrect attitude towards AIDS. But all the categories flip over and upside down when it comes to Israel and Zionism. Why? Here are some suggestions, offered in the spirit of inquiry.

Despite its socialist appearance—kibbutzes, female soldiers, and the rest—Zionism is a profoundly conservative idea, based on the re-creation of an ancient nation and culture. It is also globally conservative, requiring a definite and uncompromising form of national sovereignty and an implicit rejection of multiculturalism. Israel

stands—alone in its region—for placing the rule of law above the rule of power. Its destruction would be a disaster for what remains of the civilized world. Yet it has never been so threatened.

The recent Iraq war has done substantial damage to Israel's hopes of survival, damage that was implicit in the pro-war case from the start. Those Zionists who supported the war made a serious mistake. The marketers of political and diplomatic cliché have expressed surprise that George W. Bush fulfilled his earlier pledge to pursue the road map to peace. How wrong they were. Even as the doomed Abu Mazen is carted off the stage in a bruised heap, the absurd effort to find a Palestinian Authority chieftain who both has any power and believes in compromise continues. If they had been paying attention, they would have realized that the globalist faction in the Republican Party has for many years been ready to sacrifice Israel in return for a settlement with the Muslim world.

It is strange how few have put together the two most frightening events of the year 2001, even though they took place within days of each other. The first was the Durban conference of the United Nations, supposedly “against racism.” The Muslim world chose to turn this gathering into a scream of hatred against Israel and against its protector America, so much so that the U.S. and Israeli delegations walked out. Just a

few days later came the attack of Sept. 11. It has always interested me that this event was swiftly followed by, of all things, the payment of America's back dues to the UN and the first open White House declaration of support for a Palestinian state. The War on Terror was strangely irrelevant to what had actually happened, with its clumsy ill-directed blows against Afghanistan and Iraq and its embarrassed refusal to confront Saudi involvement in terror or notice Palestinian street celebrations of the Manhattan massacre.

The alteration in policy towards Israel and the amazing pressure that must have been put on Ariel Sharon to swap his mailed club for an olive branch are by contrast real, accurately directed, and vastly significant. The trouble is, they are acts of appeasement rather than of resolution. This is serious, and if Washington is wrong (as I believe it is) about the Palestinian cause's real capacity for compromise, it will turn out to be a grave step towards the dissolution of the Israeli state—not by frontal military action but by demoralization, destabilization, and de-legitimization.

The Israeli state has many flaws that only a fool would deny. Terrorists, still not fully disowned and in some cases actually revered, were prominent in its establishment and then in its governing class. It has engaged in pre-emptive war and has driven people from their homes



Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

through fear and massacre. Some of its responses to terrorist attack have been clumsy, lazy, and incompetent. Its present Prime Minister is severely tainted by indefensibly ruthless and inhumane past actions. Its political system is designed to enthrone factions, some of them repellent. The most important fault of all is that Israel should never have been founded, and should never have *needed* to be founded. But this last fault is an involuntary one, and is the reason for many of the country's other troubles. It is no good blaming Israel for existing when its foundation was a desperate response to mechanized racial murder. Nor is it any good for supporters or opponents of modern Israel to pretend that the National Socialist massacre of Jews did not change the argument about Zionism for as far ahead as it is possible to look.

If the world were as liberal idealists imagine, Zionism ought to have been forgotten long ago as a foolish idea, a cranky and hopeless project as unrealistic as Esperanto. And if mankind were ruled by reason, then Zionism would indeed have gone the way of Esperanto. You might have thought that secularism, by making Judaism a matter of involuntary race rather than one of voluntary religion, would have resulted in near-total integration and assimilation. This did not happen. The opposite did. It is

therefore important to remember that most right-thinking people believed with utter certainty that assimilation would happen and Zionism would fail. They believed this, during the years before 1914, in a period of history similar to our own because of its illusory stability and its materialist optimism. They continued to believe it in an era similar to the one we are just entering, the years of nervous anticipation and fear of war between 1918 and 1939.

The projected "National Home for the Jews" endorsed by Britain in 1917 was never intended to become a nation. It was to be part of the British Empire, not ruling itself but governed benignly from London, a permanent way station on the proposed land-route to India and a glacis protecting the Suez Canal from any power that threatened it from the north. The British Empire accepted the Zionist scheme because it provided Britain with an excuse to straddle one of the most important pieces of strategic property in the world.

This arrangement would have safeguarded the Arab peoples already living in the neglected Ottoman sanjaks that were arbitrarily glued together to form the Palestine Mandate, an entity even more artificial than Iraq. Under British

the original Mandate. This was another accident along the way, following the diplomatic game of pass-the-parcel, which began when the French ejected the British client "King" Faisal from Syria in July 1920. They had won the territory at the peace conference and did not share T.E. Lawrence's enthusiasm for Hashemite chieftains.

To console Faisal, London gave him the throne of Iraq instead, inaugurating another permanent crisis. This displaced his brother Abdullah, who had originally been promised the Baghdad throne. Abdullah, a monarch with no realm, urgently needed another kingdom to reign over. He complained noisily and was given Transjordan to soothe his wounded feelings. Thus three-quarters of the original Palestine Mandate, the entire area east of the river Jordan, was snatched away from the projected "National Home" before it had even begun. The famous West Bank was seized illegally by Transjordan in 1948, allowing that country to change its name to Jordan. So when Israel occupied it in 1967, it merely passed from one illegal occupier to another. Though it is not widely known, this very area was originally designated for "close Jewish settlement" at the San Remo Accords,

ISRAEL IS NOT LIKE OTHER COUNTRIES BECAUSE IT IS A **WESTERN NATION** CARVED OUT OF **MIDDLE EASTERN TERRITORY**.

government, Arabs were not given the right to rule Jews, and Jews were not given the right to rule Arabs.

When the idea was first put forward, there was plenty of room for both peoples within wide frontiers. For at that stage nobody had planned to set up the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which first came to birth as the Emirate of Transjordan, hacked in a hurry out of

which defined the original Mandate and which remain the only agreed international document defining sovereignty over this territory. Even the Golan Heights, now claimed righteously by Syria, were originally within the Mandate and became part of Syria in later Anglo-French horse-trading.

There is a general assumption that Israel at some point stole its territory

from a legitimate Arab state. Many of Israel's critics seem to believe that there was at one stage a sovereign country called "Palestine" out of which the Jewish nation was unfairly carved. But no such country ever existed; Palestine was never the name of anything but a Roman province. The only previous title—for so many centuries that it had no real rival claimant—had belonged to the Ottoman Empire. From the Ottomans it passed directly to the British. When Britain, bankrupt and demoralized, scuttled from the region in 1948, Israel grabbed as much as it could of this dubious legacy. Arab armies in turn seized as much as they could.

Israelis unquestionably perpetrated unforgivable massacres and drove people from their homes. Had things gone the other way, there would have been other massacres, other refugees. Wilsonian ideals of national self-determination can take on a blood-stained tinge, just as much as imperialism, if not more so. When a colonial power vacates a disputed territory, such horrors are likely. But this was in 1948, a year after the partition of India and Pakistan, another shameful scuttle by Britain. All the refugees from that vast upheaval have found new homes. It also came shortly after the expulsion of millions of Germans from East Prussia, the Czech lands, and from Western Poland. Those dispossessed in these savage deportations have long since resettled, and no serious movement demands their return home. Why, uniquely, are the Arab refugees of 1948 still the focus of international demands for the restoration of lost lands?

There is one key difference that keeps this issue alive, especially on the Left, which mostly has not even heard of the German expulsions and would probably defend them if it had. Israel is not like other countries because it is a Western nation carved out of Middle Eastern ter-

ritory. This leads us to the uncomfortable truth—unwelcome to modern Zionists who shudder visibly at any mention of the word—that Israel is the last major European imperial colony on the face of the earth. In its struggle for survival in a world that already has enough reasons

ISRAEL IS THE **LAST MAJOR EUROPEAN IMPERIAL COLONY** ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH.

for disapproving of it, modern Israel has sought to stifle such thoughts.

But a European colony it is. What distinguishes Israel from its Arab neighbors is no longer its general prosperity and physical modernity. Oil has evened up these differences in the past decade, and, while serious squalor persists in many Arab countries, so do middle-class comfort and good, functioning services. The difference runs much deeper. Israel's people are European by culture and law, imposing that culture and law on a region where cousin marriage and tribal loyalty are normal, while pluralism, tolerance, party politics, and the rule of law are abnormal. In this, the new state is the direct heir of the British officers who governed the area as undisguised colonists between the two global wars—and from whom it has inherited much of its legal system, not to mention a chain of imperial fortresses still used by the Israeli army.

This makes Israel the permanent ally, in the Middle East, of the world's lawful and free countries. This alliance is based on cultural and political kinship, factors that cannot be altered by a tyrant's death or a *coup d'état*. Washington may be able to buy the friendship of one Arab or Muslim regime or another with arms and cash. But as soon as that regime falls, the investment of years is wasted if the new rulers are hostile.

I suspect this difference, far more than the ethnic and religious ones, arouses the hostility of Arab regimes. We do not really know what the Arab and Muslim peoples think, since such states do not have free public opinion as we know it. We do know that an ugly anti-Semitism

previously largely unknown in the Middle East, has been deliberately and crudely encouraged by Arab regimes trying to find an outlet for the justified discontents of their own poor. We also know that there has been no desire for permanent compromise and genuine peace between even the supposedly moderate Arab regimes and Israel. The state of relations between Israel and Egypt, for instance, is frigid, nervous, and held in place mainly by American



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat

subsidies, and this despite Israel's handover of territory of enormous strategic value. In fact, the Israeli-Egypt "peace," artificial and without friendship between governments or peoples, is a standing warning to those who fantasize about a "new Middle East" or a harmonious two-state solution.

The hostility is bitter, kept alive by semi-official and official media and, in a nasty new development, it is now often crudely racist, though nobody is supposed to mention this. The Western Left would drive a Holocaust-denier from any campus that employed him, but the thought police who search the minds of their domestic opponents are unmoved by the blatant anti-Semitism of the Arab terror organizations. Many who denounce Islam for its intolerance draw back from this condemnation when that intolerance is directed against Zionists. By a peculiar process of mental dishonesty so outrageous that it works, Zionism is often equated directly with German National Socialism by critics of Israel. The only reason for this absurd, disproportionate, and cynical claim is that it neutralizes the fundamental case for Zionism, namely that Germany's policy of systematic massacre was unique, and that the Jewish case for a Jewish sovereign state is therefore unique.

Conservatism is realistic, honest, consistent, and opposed to cant. It takes the side of the particular and the ancient. It sees virtues in Western civilization against its rivals. It penetrates the disguises in which history advances itself and is not fooled by passing appearances. It does not seek perfection, but it does try to be principled. On all these grounds, and because that country is threatened as never before by shallow and ill-considered idealism, conservatism should consider Israel an ally. ■

Peter Hitchens is a columnist for the London Mail on Sunday.

Graham Greene: The Toil of Belief

The English writer came to faith through doubt then struggled what he found.

By Joseph Pearce

AS THE CENTENARY of the birth of Graham Greene approaches next year, questions remain as to his enduring legacy. Although few would question his place as one of the most influential and enigmatic writers of the 20th century, it is equally true that few would agree on the exact nature of his influence or the peculiar quality of his enigma. The fact remains that Greene is not only one of the most important writers of his generation but is also one of the most elusive. Indeed, it was Greene's view that one cannot understand a man without understanding "the man within." As such, the quest for Graham Greene involves a pursuit of the Greene-eyed monster that haunted his luridly vivid imagination.

Greene's novels, and the characters that adorn them, are riddled with angst and anger. Simultaneously confused and confounded by a deep sense of guilt and failure, his characters are informed and sometimes deformed by a deeply felt religious sensibility. The oppressive weight of the real presence of Christian faith, or the terrible emptiness of its real absence, turn Greene's novels into a fascinating and unforgettable conflict between the fertile and the furtive. The depiction of a drunken priest in *The Power and the Glory*, and also in the play *The Potting Shed*, exudes Greene's

morbid preoccupation with human folly and failure, as well as exhibiting his belief in the remnants of human dignity even amidst the deepest degradation. At other times, as in *The Comedians*, he squirms amidst the squalor of sin and cynicism, or, as in *Brighton Rock*, he squeals in the sadistic self-indulgence of the psychopath.

Greene's fiction is gripping because it grapples with faith and disillusionment on the shifting sands of uncertainty in a relativistic age. His tormented characters are the products of Greene's own tortured soul, and one suspects that he was more baffled than anyone else at the contradictions at the core of his own character and, in consequence, at the heart of the characters that his rich and fetid imagination had created.

From his earliest childhood Greene exhibited a world-weariness that at times reached the brink of despair. In large part this bleak approach may have been due to a wretched childhood and to the traumatic time spent at Berkhamsted School where his father was headmaster. His writing is full of the bitter scars of his school days. In his autobiographical book *A Sort of Life*, Greene described the panic in his family after he had been finally driven in desperation to run away from the horrors of the school: "My father found the situation beyond

him ... My brother suggested psychoanalysis as a possible solution, and my father—an astonishing thing in 1920—agreed.”

For six months, the young, and no doubt impressionable, Greene lived at the house of the analyst to whom he had been referred. This episode would be described by him as “perhaps the happiest six months of my life,” but it is possible that the seeds of his almost obsessive self-analysis were sown at this time. Significantly, he chose the following words of Sir Thomas Browne as an epigraph to his first novel, *The Man Within*: “There’s another man within me that’s angry with me.”

In later years, the genuine groping for religious truth in Greene’s fiction would often be thwarted by his obsession with the darker recesses of his own character. This darker side is invariably transposed onto all his fictional characters, so that even their goodness is warped. Greene saw human nature as “not black and white” but “black and grey,” and he referred to his need to write as “a neurosis ... an irresistible urge to pinch the abscess which grows periodically in order to squeeze out all the pus.” Such a tortured outlook may have produced entertaining novels but could not produce any true sense of reality. Greene’s novels were Frankenstein monsters that were not so much in need of Freudian analysis as the products of it.

Greene’s conversion in 1926, when he was still only 21 years old, was described in *A Sort of Life*, in which he contrasted his own agnosticism as an undergraduate, when “to me religion went no deeper than the sentimental hymns in the school chapel,” with the fact that his future wife was a Catholic:

I met the girl I was to marry after finding a note from her at the porter’s lodge in Balliol protesting against my inaccuracy in writing,

during the course of a film review, of the “worship” Roman Catholics gave to the Virgin Mary, when I should have used the term “hyperdulia.” I was interested that anyone took these subtle distinctions of an unbelievable theology seriously, and we became acquainted.

The girl was Vivien Dayrell-Browning, then 20 years old, who, five years earlier, had shocked her family by being received into the Catholic Church. Concerning Greene’s conversion, Vivien recalled that “he was mentally converted; logically, it seemed to him ... It was all rather private and quiet. I don’t think there was any emotion involved.” Greene himself corroborated this when he stated in an interview, “[M]y conver-

sion was not in the least an emotional affair. It was purely intellectual.”

A more detailed, though hardly a more emotional, description of the process of his conversion was given in his autobiography. “Now it occurred to me ... that if I were to marry a Catholic I ought at least to learn the nature and limits of the beliefs she held.” He walked to the local “sooty neo-Gothic Cathedral” that “possessed for [him] a certain gloomy power because it represented the inconceivable and the incredible” and dropped a note requesting instruction into a wooden box for enquiries. His motivation was one of morbid curiosity and had precious little to do with a genuine desire for conversion. “I had no intention of being received into the Church. For such a thing to happen I would need to be

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convinced of its truth and that was not even a remote possibility.”

His first impressions of Father Trollope, the priest to whom he would go for instruction, had reinforced his prejudiced view of Catholicism: “At the first sight he was all I detested most in my private image of the Church.” Soon, however, Greene was forced to modify his view, coming to realize that his initial impressions of the priest were not only erroneous but that he was “facing the challenge of an inexplicable goodness.” From the outset he had “cheated” Father Trollope by failing to disclose his irreligious motive in seeking instruction, nor did he tell the priest of his engagement to a Catholic. “I began to fear that he would distrust the genuineness of my conversion if it so happened that I chose to be received, for after a few weeks of serious argument the ‘if’ was becoming less and less improbable.”

The “if” revolved primarily on the primary “if” surrounding God’s existence. The center of the argument was the center itself or, more precisely, whether there was any center:

My primary difficulty was to believe in a God at all ... I didn’t disbelieve in Christ—I disbelieved in God. If I were ever to be convinced in even the remote possibility of a supreme, omnipotent and omniscient power I realized that nothing afterwards could seem impossible. It was on the ground of dogmatic atheism that I fought and fought hard. It was like a fight for personal survival.

The fight for personal survival was lost, and Greene, in losing himself, had gained the faith. Yet the dogmatic atheist was only overpowered; he was not utterly vanquished. He would re-emerge con-

observation by Muggeridge than in all the pages of psycho-babble that have been written about Greene’s work by lesser critics. The paradoxical union of Catholicism and skepticism, incarnated in Greene and his work, had created a hybrid, a metaphysical mutant, as fascinating as Jekyll and Hyde and perhaps as futile. The resulting contortions and contradictions of his own character and those of the characters he created give the impression of depth; but the depth was often only that of ditch water, perceived as bottomless because the bottom could not be seen. Greene’s genius was rooted in the ingenuity with which he muddled the waters.

THE PARADOXICAL UNION OF CATHOLICISM AND SKEPTICISM, INCARNATED IN GREENE AND HIS WORK, CREATED A METAPHYSICAL MUTANT.

tinually as the devil, or at least as the devil’s advocate, in the murkier moments in his novels.

The literary critic, J.C. Whitehouse, has compared Greene to Thomas Hardy, rightly asserting that Greene’s gloomy vision at least allows for a light beyond the darkness, whereas Hardy allows for darkness only. G.K. Chesterton said of Hardy that he was like the village atheist brooding over the village idiot. Greene is often like a self-loathing skeptic brooding over himself. As such, the vision of the divine in his fiction is often thwarted by the self-erected barriers of his own ego. Only rarely does the glimmer of God’s light penetrate the chinks in the armor, entering like a vertical shaft of hope to exorcise the simmering despair.

Few have understood Greene better than his friend Malcolm Muggeridge, who described him as “a Jekyll and Hyde character, who has not succeeded in fusing the two sides of himself into any kind of harmony.” There is more true depth and perception in this one succinct

It was both apt and prophetic that Greene should have taken the name of St. Thomas the Doubter at his reception into the Church in February 1926. Whatever else he was or wasn’t, he was always a doubter *par excellence*. He doubted others; he doubted himself; he doubted God. Ironically, it was this very doubt that so often provided the creative force for his fiction. Perhaps the secret of his enduring popularity lies in his being a doubting Thomas in an age of doubt. As such, Greene’s Catholicism becomes an enigma, a conversation piece—even a gimmick. Yet if his novels owe a debt to doubt, their profundity lies in the ultimate doubt about the doubt. In the end this ultimate doubt about doubt kept Graham Greene clinging doggedly, desperately—and doubtfully—to his faith. ■

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Arts & Letters

FILM

[*Matchstick Men*]

This Con is a Pro

By Steve Sailer

AFTER A DREARY WINTER of already forgotten misfires and a dry summer of sequels, it's time for grown-ups to go back to the movies. Director Ridley Scott's august reputation is built on five memorable movies—"Alien," "Blade Runner," "Thelma & Louise," "Gladiator," and "Black Hawk Down." "Matchstick Men" isn't his sixth, but it's easily one of the best big studio releases so far in 2003.

After his hangdog performance in the flop "Windtalkers" hopefully ended Nicolas Cage's career as a \$20 million-per-blockbuster action star, the actor fired his agent and went back to his strength: playing walking advertisements for the wares of the psychopharmaceutical industry.

Granted, Cage is a bit more mature now than when he ate a live roach in 1989's "Vampire's Kiss" or played the romantic lead in 1986's "Peggy Sue Got Married" while imitating the voice of Pokey, the sidekick of the green rubber toy Gumby.

The "Matchstick Men" script by Ted Griffin ("Ocean's Eleven") and his brother Nick tosses Cage his kind of red meat. Much of the pleasure of con-man movies is watching actors switch characters on a dime, but Cage reverses the usual setup by making his false front blander than his real personality, which suffers

from obsessive-compulsive disorder, Tourette Syndrome, agoraphobia, and plain old suicidal depression. (Scott underscores Cage's tics with stutter-step editing.)

Unfortunately for a man in his line of work (swindling the elderly into paying \$500 for a \$50 water filter), the one thing he's not is an uncaring sociopath. After accidentally knocking his pills down the garbage disposal, Cage spends a week in a germ-phobic OCD frenzy, toothbrushing the undersides of all the furniture in his 1962-style swingin' bachelor pad, where a vinyl Sinatra LP is always playing on the hi-fi—not that he's had a girl over since his pregnant wife disappeared on him in 1988.

He is finally rescued by his amiable protégé, Sam Rockwell (who energetically played another con man, Chuck Barris, in last year's "Confessions of a Dangerous Mind"), who finds him a new psychiatrist. This shrink is one of those warm movie mensches (like Judd Hirsch in "Ordinary People") who set impossibly high standards of empathy and insight that unscripted psychiatrists can't live up to.

THE PLEASURE OF CON-MAN MOVIES IS **WATCHING ACTORS SWITCH CHARACTERS ON A DIME**, BUT CAGE REVERSES THE USUAL SETUP.

Cage tells him that the only thing that kept him from blowing his brains out was, "I wondered what that would do to my carpet." The psychiatrist quickly deduces that Cage's real problem is his unresolved relationship with the ex-wife. With one quick phone call, he arranges for Cage to meet the 14-year-old daughter he never knew he had, played by Alison Lohman of "White Oleander."

He's entranced by the tiny but spunky junior-high student and awkwardly tries

on the humanizing role of Dad. Taking care of her starts him thinking about getting out of the business and into a real job. With a human relationship, his symptoms come more under control. He can't resist, however, showing off to her by letting her in on the secret of the one thing he does well—cheating people.

Then, Cage discovers that his psychiatrist has been successfully treating him with placebos because the real cause of his madness is his evil job. His guilt is driving him crazy.

This kind of straightforward moral cause for sickness is common in movies because it's more satisfying than the awful randomness of real diseases. Six years ago, when I almost died of lymphatic cancer at age 38, numerous non-smokers asked my wife if I smoked, hoping that would turn my unsettling story into a tidy lesson in why I got what I deserved (and they wouldn't). They were rattled to find out I'd never smoked. Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma mostly just happens.

We find it even less acceptable that the brain also simply gets sick now and then. In "A Beautiful Mind," for example,

in order to blame John Nash's psychosis on the McCarthy Red Scare, screenwriter Akiva Goldsman moved Nash's breakdown from 1959, when McCarthy was dead and gone, to his heyday in 1953. For this, Goldsman won an Oscar because we go to movies to see a coherent universe, where cause and effect rule, not the arbitrary hammer blows of the real world.

"Matchstick Men" is poor medical science, but that helps make it a strong

story. Unfortunately, it's reminiscent of three excellent movies from last year that were superior. Cage did self-loathing even better in "Adaptation." In "Punch-Drunk Love," Paul Thomas Anderson out-directed Scott at visualizing borderline insanity. And "Catch Me If You Can" was ultimately a more emotionally engaging con-artist movie because it skipped the implausible trick ending that has become mandatory since "The Usual Suspects." ■

Rated PG-13 for thematic elements, violence, some sexual content, and language.

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MUSIC

[*Puccini: His Life and Works*, Julian Budden, Oxford University Press, 198 pages; *Puccini: A Biography*, Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, Northeastern University Press, 384 pages]

Touched By God's Little Finger

By R.J. Stove

DEPLORING HIS OWN musical tastes' unpretentiousness, writer Max Beerbohm told *New Yorker* scribe S.N. Behrman, "Anything above Puccini is above me too." That Beerbohm of all people, hardly enslaved to fashion, should have felt guilt at esteeming the Italian operatic master indicates the disdain that Puccini has traditionally aroused among ideologues since his death (mere weeks before his 66th birthday) in 1924. Communists damned him for being "fascist"; fascists, for being "internationalist"; self-conscious modernists, for being "sentimental," or "vulgar," or "eclectic," or, worse still, "reac-

tionary." So multifarious a coalition of the unwilling suggests that Puccini should have invented the epigram—alas, apocryphal—long attributed to Brahms: "If there is anyone here whom I have not affronted, I apologize."

The defensiveness of Puccini's first major biographer, the late Mosco Carner, is characteristic—as, unhappily, is Carner's Freudianism. Presumably *Madama Butterfly's* creator just could not cut the mustard unless fitted out with an adequate supply of phallic symbols and mother-fixations. Anti-Puccini sneers in one Joseph Kerman's best-selling 1956 textbook *Opera as Drama*—which called Puccini's style "false through and through," singling out *Tosca* as "that shabby little shocker" of "café-music banality"—must by now have been approvingly quoted by tens of thousands of college students in their coursework. The scholarly justice that Puccini began receiving from the 1980s onwards made precious little impact outside Italy. Over in the boondocks, of course, even Carner's polite applause remained unthinkable. Anyone who endured Australian universities' Cold-War-era music schools will remember the prevalent baying of scorn for late-Romantic Italians in general and for Puccini in particular, who needed to be flushed from students' digestive tracts by wholesale force-feeding of Anton Webern, Pierre Boulez, Elliott Carter, Iannis Xenakis, and other such high-modernist castor-oils.

Nevertheless, the two volumes reviewed here suggest that *finis* has now been written beneath this nonsense. Obviously some deep law of physics operates whereby, after a major musician has gone for ages without an English-language biography, two biographies appear at once. Half-forgotten Edwardian Sir Charles Villiers Stanford benefited several months ago from such a biographical double-whammy. So, in 1999, did Camille Saint-Saëns. Now Puccini gets his turn. The well-heeled Puccini buff will snap up both publications; the less affluent or less devoted reader should assess his own priorities before choosing.

Julian Budden's tome excels when

surveying Puccini the composer, Mary Jane Phillips-Matz's when surveying Puccini the man. Budden (a former BBC radio producer in the days when "the Beeb" positively gloried in its elitism) writes brisk, culturally literate British English: all muscle, no fat. He faults the grammar of a Latin phrase that Puccini chose for *Tosca's* Act I finale; splendidly dismisses the French play that Puccini reworked for this opera as a "clockwork mechanism lubricated by historical erudition"; and makes delightful vignettes from the book's supporting cast. Nothing in Phillips-Matz's observations matches, for sheer vividness, Budden on Puccini's Milan acquaintance Marco Sala ("among his less savory diversions was the teaching of improper songs to prim young Englishwomen, who would perform them without understanding a word") or on Puccini's choleric librettist Luigi Illica ("a duel had cost him part of an ear"). Phillips-Matz has spent decades interviewing, it seems, *everyone* who even tangentially impinged on Puccini's temporal existence. If you want each familial scrapbook marginalium, each school report card, each detail of Puccini's diabetes, résumés for almost all who performed him in his lifetime, you must read her. Yet occasionally she can resemble the most clichéd Californian therapist, as when describing Puccini's tempestuous marriage: "A modern counselor might say that both were enablers." Yes, a modern counselor might say many other things too, equally generalized, equally ineffectual.

Puccini's less publicized achievements included confirming—along with his contemporaries Edward Elgar and Richard Strauss—that brilliance combined with ordinariness will always make a much scarier spectacle than brilliance combined with dottiness, let alone with outright madness. His own censure of those "who think they require dandruff to be geniuses" epitomizes his sleepless compositional methods in one piercing phrase. No flies on his musicianship; no dandruff flakes, either. Years after he could have coasted upon his fame, he fretted as pitilessly over each new creation as if he

remained a twentysomething neophyte dreading peevish examiners. (So much for the myth of Puccini as avaricious, tear-jerking cynic.) A musicologist's nightmare, he regarded every score as a work-in-progress. With his first masterpiece, *Manon Lescaut*, he subsequently tinkered for 30 years. He risked the paralyzing humility of a congenital perfectionist. After every operatic feat, he set the bar higher. Budden rightly calls him "as parsimonious with notes as was Berlioz. Nor was it mere indolence, but rather a reluctance to commit to paper any idea of whose value he was not convinced."

At least Berlioz finished most of his musical conceptions. Puccini, by contrast, repeatedly aborted operatic projects—many times after months, occasionally after years, of anguished labor. Some of these cancellations scarcely warranted enthusiasm even as consummations; the world is unlikely to have lost much when he scrapped one opera based on a French soft-porn S&M novel. Still, music could well be the poorer for his abandonment of operas devoted to Marie Antoinette, to the 13th-century saint Margaret of Cortona, and (surely the saddest deficit of all, given the common ground between Puccinian and Kiplingesque vehemence) to *The Light That Failed*.

The thinness of Puccini's skin remains a marvel, as does the inanity of the press notices he attracted. *La Bohème*, journalists assured 1890s readers, "will not leave much of a mark on the history of our lyric theater" and had "no principle of musical organization whatever." "With *Tosca*," pontificated some other expert shortly afterwards, "Puccini has not composed an original opera." *La Fanciulla del West*, similarly, lacked "any appeal beyond that of emphasizing the meretricious elements of the libretto." "Puccini is a decadent manipulator": thus a certain Fausto Torrefranca (what, you've not heard of him?), who recklessly predicted that said manipulator "will be forgotten within a few years."

If newspapermen were not savaging him, his spouse Elvira (*née* Bonturi) was. Grimly aware of her husband's womanizing penchant, she sprinkled

bromide over his trousers, to no discernible effect. He covered his tracks so well that some of his mistresses remained undiscovered by outsiders for a quarter of a century after his funeral; of one, we know even today only her Christian name, "Corinna." Elvira—acquiring a characteristic vise-like grip on the wrong end of the stick—hounded to suicide a maidservant with whom, improbably enough, Puccini's dealings seem to have been wholly innocent (and who undeniably died *virgo intacta*).

LA BOHÈME, JOURNALISTS ASSURED 1890s READERS, "WILL NOT LEAVE MUCH OF A MARK ON THE HISTORY OF OUR LYRIC THEATER"

The lady who most interested Puccini's mind felt, surprise surprise, little or no interest in his body: Sybil Seligman, a banker's wife whose relations with the composer—she coaxed from him most of what few aesthetic reflections he wrote—appear to have been platonic.

She probably could not, certainly did not, assuage his lifelong melancholia. Aged 52, he moaned to a correspondent, "I have always tried to love people; but no one has ever understood me, that is, people have always taken me wrong. Now it is too late; I am too old. ... Please go on being my friend." Addicted to cigarettes, he died of throat cancer with his last and greatest opera, *Turandot*, unfinished. It is somehow appropriate that critic after critic derided the completion of *Turandot* by Neapolitan musician Franco Alfano, wholly unaware that the completion as it stood was not Alfano's intention at all. Toscanini so disliked Alfano's contribution (thinking it overly individual) that he hacked and gouged it mercilessly, reducing it from 377 bars to 268. Not until the 1980s, both Alfano and Toscanini having long since died, did Alfano's original handiwork attract serious academic and executant consideration. This means that all pre-1980s *Turandot* critical commentary—not 10 percent, not 90 percent, but all—is now worthless and should be acknowledged

as such. Regrettably, most opera houses (and record labels everywhere) have ignored the earlier Alfano version: a dereliction of artistic duty that would now be unconscionable in Mozart or Janáček, but that Pucciniphils are expected to tolerate in silence.

Near his life's end Puccini wrote a much-quoted credo: "Almighty God touched me with His little finger and said: 'Write for the theater—mark you, only for the theater!' And I have obeyed the divine command." "Divine command"—how

oddly such words must sound to those unfortunates who habitually explain all inspirations from Desdemona to Donald Duck in terms of economic determinism, or Great Eurocentric Patriarchal Conspiracies, or whatever other grand Theory Of Everything Susan Sontag propounded in *The New York Review of Books'* latest issue. Yet how plausible, indeed how inevitable, the notion "divine command" seems to those with the slightest grasp of what a rare thing consistent melodic invention is: let alone of the mastery needed to develop such invention for hours at a stretch. Wagner called composing not "the art of melody" but "the art of transition." Had not Puccini—like Wagner—possessed such art at an extraordinary level, no amount of thematic vigor could have brought him sustained dramaturgical greatness. (Witness those Purcell, Handel, Rameau, and Schubert operas now on CD: melodically abundant but, on the whole, theatrically inert.) Fortunately both Budden and Phillips-Matz leave intact, in their very different ways, the mystery of Puccini's muse: a mystery almost as impenetrable to him as it shall always be to us. ■

R.J. Stove lives in Melbourne, Australia, and is the author of The Unsleping Eye: Secret Police and Their Victims.

BOOKS

[Waiting for Snow in Havana:
Confessions of a Cuban Boy,
Carlos Eire, The Free Press, 388
pages]

Dreaming of Cuba Libre

By Jonathan Chaves

The eternal fountain is unseen.
How well I know where she has been
in black of night.
—St. John of the Cross

CARLOS EIRE IS ANOTHER who has found the eternal fountain, in the depths of the blackest night. This book, which has brought me to outright belly laughter and to tears repeatedly, proves it.

Last June, at a conference held at Boston College on the role of the Jesuits in “cultures, sciences, and the arts, 1540-1773,” I encountered him for the first time. He and I were both participants. Eire, the T. Lawrason Riggs Professor of History and Religious Studies at Yale, spoke at a plenary session on “Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, S.J. (1595-1658), Baroque Best-Seller.”

In his talk, Eire presented Nieremberg as a counter-figure to several of the worst aspects of modernity. But beyond this, he contrasted the writings of his author to the moral confusion of our own intellectuals, especially in light of 9/11, in a way one no longer expects to hear from an academic. He came across as a real human being.

And then, last spring, there was Eire in the pages of—*People* magazine, accompanying a very positive review of a new book of his memoirs of growing up in pre-Castro Cuba! I knew I had to get the book and read it. This I did, right away.

For two decades, there has not been an American book as gripping and moving as this one. As a poetic and humor-

ous reminiscence about boyhood, it calls to mind such masterpieces as *The Lost Grove* by Spanish poet, Rafael Alberti, or Pablo Neruda's autobiography. I was reminded too of *Report to Greco* by Nikos Kazantzakis, as well as the only Asian book of this kind worthy to be included in this company, *Something Like an Autobiography*, by—amazingly enough—the great Japanese film director Akira Kurosawa.

But no, these comparisons prove unfair to Eire because he actually surpasses them all. He has their deep poetry, their realization that no “magic realism” is required when reality *qua* reality is itself innately numinous, and he has their ability to bring to life the often hilarious ways in which boys explore, discover, and experiment ... but he has something they lack. He has seen the hand of God somehow hidden beneath the kaleidoscopic wonder of it all. When he tells us that the one book he was allowed to take with him when he was airlifted from Cuba in 1962 at the age of 11, never to return—Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*—actually saved him, we believe him. William F. Buckley Jr. famously complained in *God and Man at Yale* that God had been banished from that institution; but now He has been returned.

It is impossible to select just one scene to epitomize Eire's sure touch in conjuring up his childhood adventures. Sending a lizard to the moon? Killing off all the lizards within the area of one square block? Co-ordinating with four friends to hit with homemade peashooters the world's biggest butt? The greatest breadfruit fight in history? And countless others.

Mark Twain captured the magic and wacky humor of boyhood in *Tom Sawyer*, as did Booth Tarkington in *Penrod*; Eire tells us truly that “Memory is the most potent truth,” and he too possesses a power of memory that is able to translate into prose such glorious moments of boyhood as his encounter with the toy soldiers in the dusty bin of a *quinalla*, or little neighborhood general store:

I couldn't resist the pleas of the poor, neglected toy soldiers. These weren't Cossacks. They were American army men. Nice and green. ... bazooka guy, radio-telephone guy, crawling-with-rifle guy, standing-up-shooting guy, kneeling-shooting guy, grenade guy, bayonet guys, binoculars guy, pistol guy, flamethrower guy, mortar guy, minesweeper guy. ... They called out to me: ‘Take us home. We're yours. We belong to you. Free us. We will fight for you.

Or there is the plight of his friend, Ernesto, after a rock fight in which the boys simply heaved little boulders at each other:

Few noises in the world compare to that of a large rock breaking someone's nose. I won't even try to describe it. ... Ernesto passed out. He was knocked out cold. [He] was bleeding as none of us had ever seen anyone bleed, not even in a movie. Blood was streaming out of what had been his nose like two small rivers. Not at all like the champagne that had spurted out of Jorge's nose for a few seconds at that wedding where he and I got drunk. Not at all like the tiny rivulets that dribbled down Kirk Douglas's face in *The Vikings*, when his eye was mauled by a hawk's talons. These were two swiftly flowing rivers pouring forth from Ernesto's nose, two strong red gods.

Nor can one single out the best of the many symbols that haunt the imagination of boy and man: clouds shaped like Cuba? Rainbow waves of parrot-fish? Bottomless abysses beneath the ocean that surrounds the island? Swimming pools filled with ever-growing populations of sharks?

Eire's portrayals of his family members and Cuba's cast of bizarre characters are unforgettable. There is Eugenio, a neighborhood friend who was “the luckiest and craziest of all of us. ...

When we first met him, my brother and Manuel dubbed him *El Apestoso* or Stinky, because he smelled so bad. But then he started to use deodorant, and

flying through the air. Arrows and battering rams. Swords. Sword stumps, ever. No firing squads, no cowardly shooting at men in soiled

be adorned as well by a volume that does full justice to the Maximum Leader of the Cuban revolution.

The scenes in which Fidel himself appears are riveting, as is the visit of cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin to Havana. So too the descriptions of the firing squads, both real and fake, and other forms of torture: "... as bombs fell from the sky, and bullets flew, and money evaporated, and Fidel lay claim to our souls, and everyone I knew and cared about vanished quietly, and I began to face the prospect of my own vanishing, what do I remember most vividly?—*Her* beautiful brown hair brushing against her neck. It was cut in such a straight, straight line."

The real truth about the experience of such loss can never be conveyed by merely political, let alone economic, analysis. It requires the touch of a poet, aware at once of the irreducible wholeness and complexity of human life. Eire is such a writer. ■

Jonathan Chaves is professor of Chinese at The George Washington University. One of his books, Pilgrim of the Clouds, was nominated for the National Book Award in the translation category.

THIS BOOK MUST JOIN THE SHORT LIST OF THE **FINEST LITERARY REVELATIONS** WE POSSESS OF THE **HORROR OF COMMUNISM.**

we had to find another nickname for him. So we began to call him *El Alocado*, the Crazy One." His third-grade teacher, "the master of hell and damnation," is described in terms that conjure up a vision of Nosferatu:

He was short. Probably between five feet three and five feet four. And he looked a little bit like the Mexican actor Cantinflas, but without the silly moustache. His hands were in proportion to his slight frame but had very long, thin fingers. They reminded me of the tines on the pitchforks that devils supposedly carried around in hell—those pitchforks with which they loved to skewer you forever and ever.

But equally good is Eire's way of capturing the soul-forming significance of American films for a young boy in such a country as Cuba. Scenes from "The Vikings" (as in Ernesto's nose-crisis) or "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" played as important a role in forming his inner world as did the houseful of bizarre and terrifying *objets d'art* for which his father eventually decided to sacrifice his own chance at freedom and remain in Fidel's prison-island: "Eye Christ," "Candlestick Lady," and others of their ilk. As a young, imaginative boy in Cuba, he already yearns for the North, inspired by "The Vikings" and Kirk Douglas:

I had it all figured out. ... Northern was better. Definitely greater tolerance for pain, greater valor, and no lizards on top of it. Axes. Big axes

pants who were tied up and couldn't defend themselves.

That is why, once he reaches America, having lost everything and living now hand-to-mouth, he is able to proclaim, "God bless the roaches behind the wallpaper, and the screws at the factory, and the broken dishes at the Conrad Hilton Hotel [where he washed dishes for a living]." And yet it is later the schools of parrot-fish forming multicolored waves that will haunt him.

Finally, this book must join the short list of the finest literary revelations we possess of the sheer nightmarish horror of Communism. The same shelf that holds the works of Solzhenitsyn, Milosz, and Ch'en Jo-hsi (for Maoland) may now



"... If you'd like to hear all of your options again, press 49. If you've forgotten why you called in the first place, press 50."

[*The Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown, Doubleday, 454 pages]

The Greatest Story Ever Sold

By Michael S. Rose

WHAT MAKES FOR A best-selling novel these days? Not just any run-of-the-mill best-seller, but a book that claims the number-one spot on the *New York Times* charts week after week, a novel that tops every other major best-seller list for months?

Try this formula: in wind-up-toy fashion, repeat all the prejudices of the ruling cultural elite. Echo pet theories that trash the foundations of Western civilization. Wrap it all in a compelling story line with a sensitive Harvard professor protagonist and a pious Opus Dei assassin. Add a dash of superficial rumination on concepts like cryptology and iconography. Above all, claim that the lump sum is based on historical reality that's been painstakingly researched by the author.

You've got yourself *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, who has proved to us all that straight, white men with uninspiring Anglo-Saxon names are still capable of delivering the right stuff.

Brown has begotten a mystery thriller that has captivated one million readers so far this year—no small achievement!

When asked on NBC's "Today" show how he accounts for his runaway success, the author replied, "I think it's because the book deals with themes that really cut across a huge portion of the population." I beg to differ.

Brown's themes hardly cut across a huge portion of the population. They simply rip right through the fundamental moral and religious tenets of Christianity. In these times when just about everything is regulated by political correctness, *The Da Vinci Code* reminds us that it remains a legitimate endeavor to skewer Jesus Christ, Christian believers, and the Catholic Church. One character succinctly summarizes the main theme of Brown's work when he says, "What I mean is that almost everything our fathers taught about Christ is false." In other words, the greatest story ever told turns out to be the greatest story ever sold, and the Church has been lying and killing for decades to protect its false story of a divine Savior called Jesus Christ.

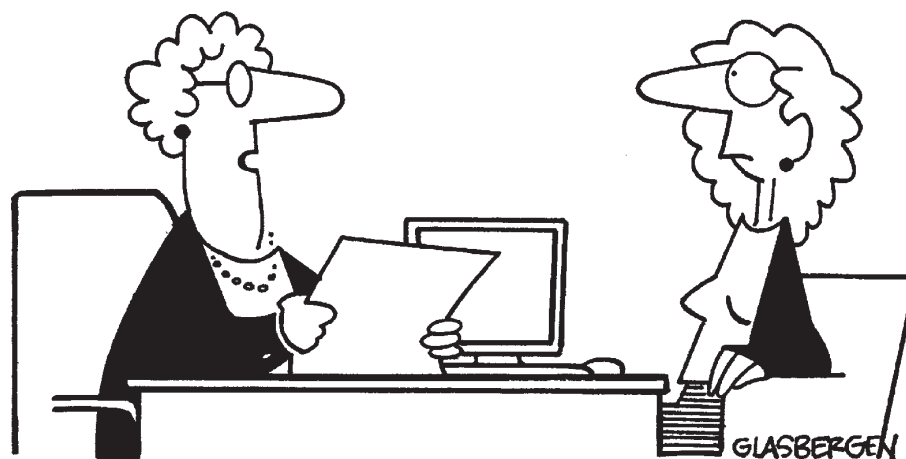
Brown's runaway success, however, is not primarily a product of his literary talent. He is undoubtedly capable of producing a compelling story. But his writing isn't that interesting. Most of his characters are little more than stick fig-

ures, and the plot is more or less a rehash of Grail-quest books of yesteryear. (In fact, according to *Newsweek*, Brown is allegedly being sued for plagiarism by author Lewis Perdue, who claims that *The Da Vinci Code* is too eerily similar to his 1999 novel *Daughter of God* to be coincidence.)

The real draw for Brown's hot novel is how his highly polemical premise—that Christianity is a sham, little more than an age-old instrument of oppression—has been publicly lauded by America's cultural elite. The keystone of the novel's success is the skillful (and shameless) marketing technique of its promoters. *The Da Vinci Code*, although a work of fiction, has been presented by marketeers and influential reviewers as being grounded in "erudite" scholarship. When asked how much of his novel is based on reality, in terms of things that actually occurred, Brown told "Today's" Matt Lauer, "Absolutely all of it. ... All of the art, architecture, secret rituals, secret societies, all of that is historical fact." That presumably includes Brown's nuggets of religious history, which are, in nearly every instance, distortions and fabrications used to advance his premise.

Reviewers in the most influential venues such as the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and National Public Radio have uncritically repeated the marketeers' fantastic claims that Brown has written a learned piece of historical fiction. No doubt the author did plenty of research, but he researched far-fetched Gnostic conspiracy theories involving secret societies. Although he wrote a piece of fiction, these conspiracy theories are oddly presented by reviewers and promoters as *bona fide* history.

It's not Brown's superficial mention of The Vitruvian Man or the Fibonacci Sequence that interests book promoters. After all, any C-student eighth grader, drawing on the results of a single Google search, could do the same. The fruit of Brown's research that is so popular with reviewers: Mary Magdalene was Jesus Christ's lover ("Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth");



"We're a family-friendly company. If you're required to work more than 90 hours a week, we'll contribute \$1,500 toward your divorce."

Magdalene was pregnant with Christ's child at Golgotha; the sexist apostles were envious of her, and therefore the early Church launched a smear campaign to cover up her role as the "sacred feminine" and "goddess." In other words, although Christ was definitely *not* divine, for some reason that remains unexplained in *The Da Vinci Code*, Mary Magdalene was. Oh yes, and historical personalities such as Leonardo Da Vinci, Sandro Boticelli, Sir Isaac Newton, Victor Hugo, Walt Disney, and Jean Cocteau worshipped Mary Magdalene as the "Sacred Feminine," protecting this big secret from an unsympathetic world.

Brown's readers are gullible to believe that just because these conspiracy theories are found on the Internet, then they must be legitimate, that just because he reports something from some obscure Web site it can be considered research. Nonetheless, with the help of friends like the *New York Times*, which trumpeted *The Da Vinci Code* as "gleefully erudite," the reading public is led to believe that Brown boldly reveals the truth (at last!) about the Vatican's longstanding dirty war against the true feminine deity that has constantly posed a threat to the predominantly sexist Church.

Reader reviews on Web sites such as Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com confirm this. One reader writes, "This book literally made me stop and rethink all I have been taught my whole life." Another: "It changes everything I have ever been taught about the Catholic Church." *The Da Vinci Code* is repeatedly referred to as "eye-opening," and reader reviewers commonly cluck that they are grateful for being taught important pieces of history that have been suppressed by the Catholic Church, for example: that the Bible was not inspired by the Holy Spirit but is merely a man-made chronicle that twisted history in order to suit the purposes of early Church misogynists; that Original Sin was a concept invented by men in order to oppress women; that the divinity of Christ was invented centuries after the crucifixion in order to shore up support for the male-dominated Church.

According to *Da Vinci Code* scholarship, the Catholic Church, in its "tradition of misinformation," systematically subjugated women, banished the goddess, burned nonbelievers, and forbade the pagan reverence for the sacred feminine. That about sums up what readers are finding enlightening, even though Brown is simply regurgitating the most provocative of anti-Christian conspiracy theories floating aimlessly through cyberspace.

Brown admits that it was his art-historian wife who gave him the apple about Leonardo Da Vinci's involvement in a secret society whose *raison d'être* is to protect the secret of the Holy Grail, that the true Grail is Mary Magdalene, and that she ought to be worshipped according to secret yin-yang sex rituals as the goddess of choice. "I approached [the theory] with some skepticism," he admitted to Matt Lauer, "and became a believer." One can almost picture Brown kneeling weepy-eyed in adoration at the tomb of Mary Magdalene as does his Harvard protagonist in the final pages of the book.

As much as Brown is a "believer," his novel is a book about unbelief. In this respect, Dan Brown has accomplished more in just a few months than a boatload of progressive theologians could dream of accomplishing in a lifetime. Through the ingenious approach taken by *The Da Vinci Code*'s promoters, Dan Brown has formidably challenged long-held truths about faith and morals through a work of popular fiction. At the same time, he has replaced those long-held beliefs with a politically correct form of goddess worship that demands little in the way of accountability when it comes to personal morality. In fact, for *Da Vinci Code* protagonists, a public sex act is the most expressive form of worship. No wonder the book is such a thriller. ■

Michael S. Rose is the author of four books including the New York Times best-seller Goodbye, Good Men. His latest book, Priest, was published last month by Sophia Institute Press.

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Royal Flush

Richard Cummings's piece on Saudi Arabia in the last issue of *AC* brought back memories. According to Cummings, the revolution in Saudi has begun in earnest.

I sure hope so. I've seen Saudi Arabian excesses from up close, and it is not a pretty sight.

Take titles, for a start. Americans are not very familiar with titles in general and Saudi so-called royal titles in particular. The Saud clan, all 30-odd thousand of them, all go by the title "prince" or "princess," but they are nothing of the kind. They simply belong to the tribe of Saud, a bunch of Bedouins who won out over the Hashemites that ruled the sands of Arabia until some 70 years ago.

Here's the difference: European titles, especially princely ones, are conferred to individuals by emperors and kings for great feats. This custom has been curtailed, recent conferred titles for services rendered to one's country being of lower rank than princely ones, such as Duke of Suarez in Spain or Baroness Thatcher, as in the case of the great Maggie. Princely titles and their families in Europe are published in the *Almanach De Gotha*, a sort of social register for nobility, which includes reigning and formerly reigning royal houses, as well as Sovereign Houses of the Holy Roman Empire. No fake or made-up princely titles have ever been published in the hallowed pages of the *Almanach de Gotha*.

Enter the Saudis—and 30,000 camel drivers who suddenly declared themselves princes and princesses. As a European, whose name is included in the *Almanach De Gotha* (through marriage, alas), I can only laugh. As an American citizen, however, I am outraged that these sand-dwelling klepto-

crats are addressed as their highnesses in capitals of the Western world.

Let's start with the present king of Saudi Arabia, Fahd. I first met him in London during the late Sixties at Aspinall's gambling club, back then called the Clermont. John Aspinall, or Aspers, was a conservationist and breeder of wild animals who funded his zoos by fleecing the rich and the bored. He ran the most extravagant and elegant gambling house the world has ever seen. No Las Vegas glitz *chez* Aspers, just a lot of Old Etonians and Brit upper-class men who gambled away their inheritances. Once the thin blue line of British aristocracy had begun to run dry as far as funds were concerned, Aspers was obliged to look elsewhere. The first "live" one he brought in was Fahd, a pudgy but good-looking chap accompa-

called Lucan because of a 10-year run of bad luck, fell on his sword immediately after his heinous act, but his body, whose remains are in the bottom of the Channel, has never been found, thus protecting his children from being *de jure* offspring of a murderer.) Aspinall knew better than to introduce the man as his highness to us, but the croupiers and the valets were instructed to address him as royalty at all times.

Actually I remember feeling sorry for the man, or perhaps it was his young companion who attracted me. He was back then the crown prince, although it wasn't clear who would inherit the throne of King Faisal. Fahd turned out to be tricky. Every time he would win a hand at chemmy he would apologize to the loser, a habit I found attractive because I had seen it done in Egypt during Farouk's days, when my father was gambling at the Mohammed Ali Club of Cairo. Yet he would never allow anyone to invest in his hand—a common courtesy extended to those who couldn't

ENTER THE SAUDIS—AND **30,000 CAMEL DRIVERS** WHO SUDDENLY DECLARED THEMSELVES **PRINCES AND PRINCESSES**.

nied by a very beautiful Middle-Eastern young woman who pulled up a chair at the chemin-de-fer table.

Those were politically incorrect times, and nowhere was it more politically incorrect than at Aspinall's. "Must we sit here with your Nubian slaves?" asked Lord Lucan, a terrific snob and, alas, a good friend of mine who some years later murdered his children's nanny whom he confused for his wife, the intended victim. ("Lucky," as we

afford the minimum and rode piggy-back on a richer man's cards as a result—did not mix in the baddinage with the rest of the punters, and didn't tip.

Every night he came in with a different young woman, all of them very pretty, but when anyone tried to talk to them Fahd made a terrific fuss to Aspinall and threatened to stop gambling. He was a big gambler, and I assume he must have dropped a packet because soon after he was brought into our game Aspers



bought Port Lympne, the Sassoon mansion in seaside Kent that bordered Aspinall's Palladian mansion next door. I was not as lucky as Aspers. My biggest bet against Fahd's bank one night was an astronomical amount that I couldn't possibly afford. I nevertheless called banco and got the second-best hand in chemin-de-fer, an eight. "Sorry," smiled Fahd, and produced a nine. I threw up in the bathroom immediately after, asked Aspinall for time to pay, and never saw Fahd ever again.

Mind you, Fahd had done nothing wrong. He was quite polite—distant and uninterested in his surroundings—but tough as hell with the girls and the staff. He was a brave gambler, but most of us would have been just as brave if the money we were playing with was monopoly money, which in reality Arabian funds are. (It would be like George W. playing with Fort Knox gold.)

These "princes" have been using state funds since they came to power early last century. Take, for example, Marbella, Spain, where Fahd has a summer house.

Twelve large jets were required to move him and his entourage from a hospital in Geneva to the Spanish resort only last year. Three hundred black Mercedes cars were produced overnight to serve the flunkies. Not a single mobile telephone was to be found within an area of 50 miles from Marbella. While Fahd was in Geneva undergoing tests—his prodigious intake of rich food has turned him into a blob whose knees cannot support him—the toadies came up to Gstaad and took over every available hotel room. They were rude beyond imagination and demanded that the shops open in the middle of the night, usually after 2 a.m., so they could shop in private.

Fahd's so-called royal household spends \$80 million a week while in Marbella. Back in Saudi Arabia, the costs are multiplied. And it's all oil moolah, supposedly belonging to the people of Saudi Arabia but expropriated by the Saud clan and put to use for fun and games.

Now the oil kingdom is finally in danger of combustion. The reports detailing the Saudi role in the events leading up to the 9/11 attacks have mostly been suppressed. But in my mind, there is no doubt that Saudi diplomats provided financial and logistical support for the terrorists. Only after Sept. 11 did the global extent of the Wahabi menace become clear. Saudi money has been deployed on a colossal scale to finance al-Qaeda and to buy protection. It is a lunatic fringe backed by one of the greatest concentrations of wealth in the world.

The diplomatic counter-offensive by the Saudis, however, has been formidable. Riyadh, in the person of Ambassador Bandar, has managed to corrupt most American diplomats who deal with the oil-rich country. It is pre-emptive bribing on an unprecedented scale, and Bandar is the man who has pulled it off for years. (His wife Haifa, who was caught red-handed giving money to terrorists posing as students, had *la creme de la creme* of Washington defending her.) It is said that "Crown Prince" Abdullah is a moderate. He is only moderate when compared to Sultan, his half brother, the defense minister who is the father of Bandar and a close friend of the Bin Laden family.

The day these modern day Ali Babas are sent away to the French Riviera for good will be a good one for America as well as for the rest of the world. ■